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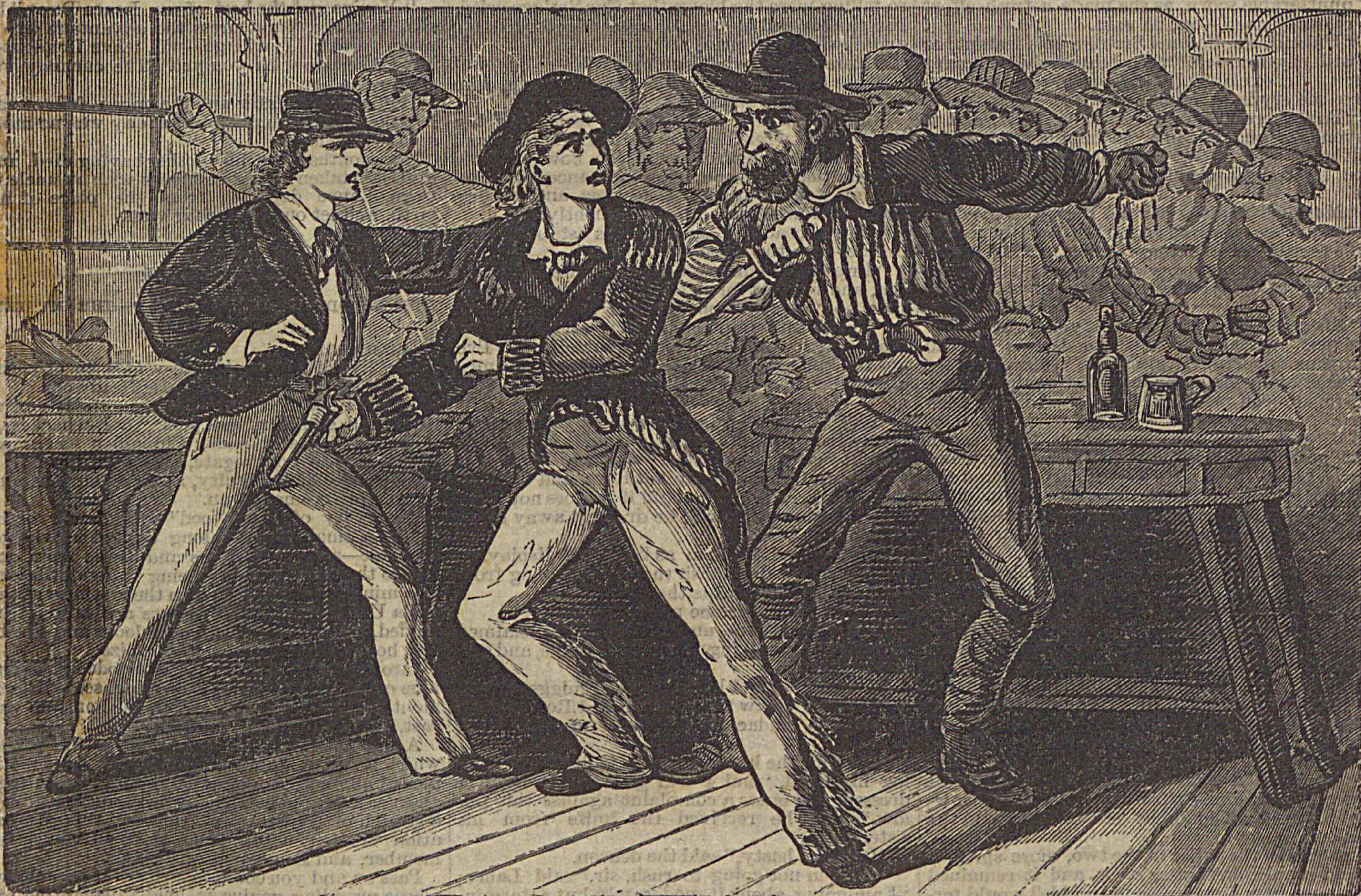
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LANCE, THE LION.



Suddenly there was a wild surge of the crowd about our hero; then a wild cry, a frightful oath, and the gleam of a knife.

CHAPTER I.

THE TWINS—THE LION AND THE CUR.

LANCELOT DANE (he had been called "Lance" for short, from a very early period of his existence), was born in Rondout, now Kingston, and breathed the invigorating mountain air of that magnificent region known as the Highlands of the Hudson, from the hour of his birth to his nineteenth year.

At the age of thirteen, Lance and a twin sister named Rose, were left fatherless.

Of the former, his father had often said: "Lance is as smart as they make 'em—he's a lion."

His estimate was not an extravagant one.

Lance was smart at his books in school, and at everything else he took hold of, and a boy that knew no fear.

Of his companions he was the acknowledged and popular leader, and a favorite everywhere he was known.

At the age of seventeen he was a daring and dashing rider, and as a hunter and fowler known far and wide; he was a prodigy with the rifle and fowling piece, and, for that matter, with the pistol, firearms being his great delight.

His courage was of the most unflinching character, danger having no more terrors for him than a dinner for a hungry man; and before he was fifteen he was known far and near as "Lance, the Lion."

When about seventeen, Lance and Rose ac-

quired a stepfather—an austere deacon of the most uncompromising nature—and a step-cousin (nephew of the deacon) a boy two years older than themselves, and as ignoble and treacherous in disposition, as Lance was generous and lion-like.

Lance had always had the "run" of his happy home; that is, being a dutiful and loving son, he felt no heavy hand upon him controlling his movements, his mother ruling him with a loving grace.

But with the coming of the deacon and his nephew into his heretofore happy home, Lance found himself opposed and thwarted at every turn; and it was not long before open war was declared between our hero on the one hand, and the "allied forces," including not only the dea-

con and his nephew, Samuel, but, we are sorry to say, the mother of Lance, now completely under the control of the deacon, on the other.

It was three against one—no, three against two, for Rose, who, resisting the advances and importunities of her step-cousin, who annoyed and tormented her, herself rebelled against the deacon, who stood by his nephew against either and both of his step-children; and the war was hot if not bloody.

The deacon's nephew, whom all the boys called "Cur Smiggs," or simply "Cur," continued by his hateful presence and manner, to render the life of Rose Dane as miserable as it well could be; and the deacon made it as "hot" as possible for Lance; the mother of the latter espousing the side of her husband, who ruled her with an iron will.

Where formerly all was happiness for Lance and Rose, all was now the opposite.

This state of affairs had continued for a year, when one day "Cur" Smiggs, finding Rose alone in the house, made himself particularly obnoxious to her, and to avoid him, she had run out of the cottage to the garden in the rear, he, however, following, and catching hold of her by the wrists, holding her tightly.

"Let me go!" she cried, endeavoring in vain to free herself from the young fellow's grasp.

"Not till you give me a kiss," was the response, the bead-like black eyes of the speaker snapping and sparkling with a baleful fire.

"Let me go, I tell you, or I will scream as loud as I can—you hateful thing!"

"Hateful, eh? Why, I am to be your husband, Rose—the old folks have settled that!"

A sinister smile played on the lips of the young man, as he uttered these words; while there flashed to meet it from the eyes of Rose, a look of unutterable scorn, as she made a fresh effort to release herself—but in vain.

"Unhand me, Samuel Smiggs, this instant, or I will cry murder!" the righteously indignant young girl exclaimed; and waiting an instant, gave the cry in shrieking tones.

"Bah! there is no one at home, Rose; and if anyone else should come, I would laugh it off as a joke—and so it is. But come—I will release you, if you will promise not to run away from me."

"Murder!" again screamed Rose, and the next instant there was a strong grasp on her assailant's throat, the choking causing him to loosen his hold on the young girl, when he was flung whirling to the ground, striking it with great force.

"Miserable dog, they named you rightly, Cur Smiggs!" exclaimed Lance, for it was he who had thus opportunely arrived; "miserable dog, never lay your hands on my sister again—never! If you do you would wish you had never been born!"

Tall and handsome, straight as the weapon that bears his name, a model of strength and grace, Lance stood with his left arm around the waist of his sister, his face flushed with indignation, and his big brown eyes emitting a scathing fire as he looked upon the prostrate Cur—a fire of marvelous light and intensity.

"You are a bully, and always taking the advantage, Lance Dane!" cried the discomfited, mortified, and enraged Cur Smiggs, getting to his feet, springing, after an instant's hesitation, towards Lance, who, being an excellent boxer, "put up" at once, and easily warded off a blow aimed at him.

"Humph! you can box!" ejaculated the "Cur," with a sneer, "but try it rough-and-tumble with me, and see how you would come off—try it if you dare!"

"Come on, if that's what you want," said Lance, freeing himself from his sister, and throwing off his coat and hat, the other doing the same.

Lance was the taller of the two, more sprightly and supple, but not as stout, and it remained to be seen how a "rough-and-tumble" would terminate.

Rose did not leave the ground, as many young girls would have done, but remained ready, no doubt, to assist her brother in case he should get the worst of it.

CHAPTER II.

THE ROUGH-AND-TUMBLE—THE KNIFE.

In an instant the two grappled; the next they were on the ground, Cur Smiggs uppermost.

Just as he struck a blow at the face of Lance, the latter whirled him to the ground, and secured the position of advantage, when the struggle commenced in earnest.

Over and over they rolled, Lance now under,

now over, and the struggle being for the master position, few blows were struck.

Cur Smiggs, in his fury, wasted a good deal of strength, while Lance, who was not rage-blind, husbanded his powers, and it was almost certain that he would tire the other, and secure and hold the position of advantage on top of his foe.

The moment came at length. He got a grip on the throat of his antagonist, when the latter was right over him, whirled him over and underneath, and held him pinned tightly to the earth.

One tremendous effort young Smiggs made to better his position, but in vain—he was "wind-ed," and gone, with a tourniquet at his throat that was exceedingly tormenting.

Holding him by his left, Lance, with his right hand, could have battered the face of his antagonist to a pulp; but he forbore, contenting himself with giving him a second box on the ear—first right and then left—smart, stinging blows, with the flat of the hand.

"When you have got enough of this, say so, and I'll let you up," said Lance, after several of these ear-warmers.

"Mercy!" screamed Rose at this instant, "he has got a knife!" and springing forward, she caught the right arm of Cur Smiggs and bore it to the ground, the occasion endowing her with sufficient strength.

"The scoundrel has cut me!" exclaimed Lance, and jamming his knee upon the breast of Smiggs, he seized his wrist, twisted it, and wrenched from his hand a large-bladed knife, which the murderous young scoundrel had drawn and used.

Passing the knife to Rose, Lance, who had received an ugly but not serious gash on his left arm, proceeded to pommel the young scoundrel as severely as he was able, and so able was he, so telling were the blows, that Cur Smiggs cried, like the coward he was, for his castigator to stop, and howled with pain.

"Here—here! what's going on?"

These words came from Deacon Smiggs, who at that moment appeared on the scene.

Rose, who had come to her feet after her brother had wrenched the knife from the hand of the deacon's nephew, and who now held the weapon that had been driven at Lance and gashed him, stepped up to the speaker, and holding forth the knife, said, most vehemently:

"Your beautiful nephew has stabbed my brother—see the blood on his arm."

"Impossible—impossible!" ejaculated the deacon, and reached forth for the knife, which Rose shut, however, and put into her pocket.

"No, it isn't impossible," she said. "I saw him do it; look at the blood yourself, and I've got the knife, and you can't have it. Your miserable nephew insulted me, too, and assaulted me—"

"Yes," broke in Lance, who at this moment got up from his antagonist, dismissing him with a kick; "yes," he repeated, "this dear nephew of yours insulted and assaulted Rose, and stabbed me, the cowardly cur! And if he does not leave my house to-day he will be dragged away by an officer."

Lance bared his arm as he spoke, displaying a long but not deep gash thereon, reaching from near the wrist towards the elbow.

"There must be some mistake—"

"I didn't cut him, uncle, it's a lie!" exclaimed the nephew, breaking in upon his uncle, and getting to his feet.

"Oh, you wicked liar, Samuel Smiggs, to say that, when I saw you!" exclaimed Rose, shocked at the audacious falsehood of the young man.

"Give me the knife, Rose," said Lance, extending his hand, "and I will go and get my arm dressed, and enter a complaint against this fellow," and he received the knife from his sister.

"Don't be hasty," said the deacon.

"Oh, I'm not going to rush, sir," said Lance; "I am going about it moderately but determinedly. I will make a charge—two charges, sir—against this nephew of yours; one for insulting and assaulting my sister, of which I was a witness, and another more serious—of stabbing me—of which Rose was a witness; these, sir, if your nephew is not ordered at once to pack up his traps and be off."

The lying nephew again protested that he did not cut Lance intentionally, and that he did not assault Rose.

"It looks like a conspiracy," said the deacon, "to run my dear nephew out of the house; but it shall not succeed."

Then to Lance, directly, he said:

"You have allowed bad blood—you and Rose—"

"No matter about bad blood," interrupted

Lance, pointing to his bleeding arm. "This is good blood, and your cowardly nephew shed it! We'll let the law determine as to the conspiracy, sir!"

Turning to his sister, he said, passing a handkerchief to her:

"Bind this up, Rose, and I will go."

Not one of the fainting kind at the sight of blood, Rose bound up her brother's arm, brought him his coat and hat, and assisted him in putting on the former, the deacon and his "dear nephew" standing apart and conversing in an undertone.

Without entering the house, Lance started along the walk leading to the cottage front yard and street, Rose accompanying him.

Cur Smiggs jumped after them, and touched him on the shoulder, Lance turning to face him.

"Say, look here, stop this, and I'll be off," said the young scamp, sullenly, but in an anxious tone that betrayed his alarm at the consequences that might follow the villainous act of which he had been guilty. "I'll go—I'll leave the house right away," he added.

"And leave Rondout, also?"

"Of course not. I'll leave the house—that's enough."

"It is not enough now," returned Lance, firmly. "It is all I would have asked, had you not lied so monstrously. You must leave Rondout now—understand that."

"I won't."

"I think you will, sooner or later. If not sooner, voluntarily, then later by process of law."

Lance was dead in earnest, and Cur Smiggs, who cowered under his flashing glance, knew it; and knew that the hour of his expatriation had come.

"You've got the best of me, Lance Dane," he said, bitterly, "and press the advantage like a mean tyrant. I will go—will leave Rondout—but I'll square with you yet. The cur may yet corner the lion."

Half an hour later and the mean fellow had left the cottage, and from that day was no more seen in Rondout.

Six months later, his mother having died, and his sister taken up her residence with an uncle in town, Lance departed from the place of his birth, and set out for the far west.

CHAPTER III.

THE MELODEON AT DEADWOOD—THE MURDERIOUS SHOT.

DEADWOOD!

The liveliest town in the states to day, the town of the most intense life, is Deadwood.

Traders, speculators, miners, scouts, trappers, ranchmen, gamblers, sharpers, "bull-whackers," "greasers," half-breeds, Chinamen, negroes, etc., there do congregate, the whole forming a kaleidoscope of humanity, at once curious and thoroughly cosmopolitan.

The "City of Deadwood" extends for eight miles—a single street—along the gulch, whence its name—and is business and bustle from one end to the other, Sunday being the gala day of this mining metropolis, when the matinees at the Bella Union and Gem Theaters are largely attended, and the bars, brilliant saloons and gambling houses are immensely patronized.

Into one of the latter (The Melodeon), about nine o'clock on a Sunday evening, some fifteen months after Lance Dane left his home in the east, we must take the reader.

A bar at the right, as you enter the place, which is crowded, hot and smoky, is lined with men of all sorts, laughing, "chinning," shouting, and swearing; some, half drunk, singing, if by a stretch of courtesy we could call this vocalization "singing." It is night, the reader must remember, and Deadwood is reveling.

Pass on and you come to a *rouge-et-noir* table, whose presiding genius is loudly descanting his "little game," while he boldly proclaims to be on the "dead level," a gaping crowd listening to him, and "taking it in," each man according to his measure of gullibility.

Near by is a chuck-a-luck table, whose "banker," is a "loud" youth of ripe sixteen, no older, and "ripe" for anything.

The table is surrounded by a motley crowd; and it is evident that chuck-a-luck has more admirers than *rouge-et-noir*.

Then there is the seductive and nimble thimble-rigger, whose implements are nutshells, who is known as "Nutshell Bill," and who never makes but one bet a night in the same place, suddenly disappearing after "making a stake."

In addition to these, there is a stage whereon are seated five men in their shirt-sleeves, all

smoking clay pipes—there is an intermission as we enter—one at a piano, another with a “banjo at his side,” the three others being “vocalists” without instruments.

Some one in the audience calls for a song, and the cry is taken up by others. A moment and the singers lay down their pipes, and the pianist touches the keys of his instrument. He is interrupted instantly by a commotion at the chuck-a-luck table.

“Give me that money—you stole it,” were the hot words of demand and accusation, projected from the lips of quite a decent-looking man of thirty or so, at the face of another, who looked as though he might successfully enact the part of horse-thief, skin-gambler, “road-agent,” or murderer at very short notice, and whose heavy brow was darkened with a scowl as black as Erebus.

As a matter of course a crowd instantly gathered about the two men, with a rush from all directions to augment it.

Again the demand from the first-mentioned individual:

“Give me that money; you stole it.”
“G’way—I’ll kill you!” was the response, in a savage tone, as the hand of the speaker went to the back of his hip. “G’way f’m me, I tell yer. I’ll kill yer. I didn’t steal yer money.”

Face to face, and not four feet apart, stood the two men, the one slight, the other brawny, the first not showing by any motion that he was armed, while the contrary was the case with the other, the bystanders in his front disposing themselves accordingly.

“Will you give me that money, you thief?” again demanded the accusing man.

“I’ll give you a blue pill,” said the accused with an oath, and pulled forth a revolver.

“I am unarmed,” said the other, “and you are a coward to draw on me. But a barking dog never bites,” he added, tauntingly.

“Don’t, eh? Wal, take that!” and flash, crack, went the revolver of the ruffian, his accuser dropping to the floor with a groan.

An instant later—before the ruffian’s arm had dropped—crack went another revolver, of lesser caliber as the report indicated; then down dropped the murderous arm of the brawny ruffian, the pistol falling to the floor, as curses both loud and deep escaped his lips.

Right where the thumb joins the wrist, tearing and crashing its way through the latter, the leaden pellet had struck.

“The ‘Lion!’” ejaculated a man, as the wounded ruffian looked at his bleeding and broken wrist, cursing fearfully as he viewed it.

“The ‘Lion’—his mark!” added another individual, looking at the ugly wrist wound, the giving of which was peculiar to him who had won the *sobriquet* of “The Lion.”

“The ‘Lion’—The ‘Lion!’” went from mouth to mouth, and necks were craned, and eyes looked sharply about in quest of the noted shot; the boy, (not a man in years), who was the dread of Dakota’s desperadoes.

“Where is he?”
“Show him up!”
“Trot him out!”
“Whar’d he git?”
“Who’s seen him?”
“The devil take him!”
“I’ll shoot him on sight!”
“Got ter ketch him fust!”

Such expressions as these were freely uttered on all sides as everyone looked at everyone else, hoping to get a sight of the “Lion.”

“I’d give a day’s find in the gulch to see him,” said a miner, bringing from his pocket some specimen nuggets of virgin gold.

“An’ I’d give yer find for a month ter see him,” said another individual, who, from his looks, was probably guiltless of delving for gold, there being a less laborious method of getting it, with such as he, the right of such method not being considered.

“Twarn’t him, p’raps,” said another, “he ain’t got no patent on them shots.”

“But he’s got a patent ‘gainst bein’ shot,” still another observed.

“I’d bust his patent like I’d —”

“Bust a bank, eh, Jimmy?” broke in with a laugh, a reckless-looking individual, the previous speaker being the man who followed the miners, and who was opposed, to all appearances, to gulch mining in his own person.

“I’ll bust you, if yer don’t hold yer mules,” was the sour, angry rejoinder, the remark of the other having been too pointed, probably. The fellow was known to have been a “knight of the jimmy,” and on that account he was called “Jimmy” by his pals.

“You will, eh?” and with the words a pistol barrel gleamed, and the muzzle, with the quick-

ness of thought, was brought on a line with the eyes of Jimmy, who, yielding obedience to the only law recognized or respected by lawless men in lawless places, the law of vantage, at once “took water,” to speak inelegantly, but in the slang of the period, expressive.

“Call off yer dog—what’s the matter of ye, Jack? I didn’t mean nuth’n,” he said, in a mollified tone, and proposed a drink, which proposition was accepted, the two starting for the bar.

The time that had elapsed since the shooting, up to this moment, was very short indeed; long enough, however, for the removal of the man shot by the brawny ruffian, the latter still cursing and looking for the one who had disabled his right hand—and the interest and excitement that succeeded the shot which denoted the presence, in all probability, of the noted “Lion,” had not in any appreciable degree subsided, nearly everyone talking of, peering around for, or otherwise showing their desire to see the celebrity whose handiwork was so peculiar; and, in this instance, provided the work was of his doing, so mysterious, that the doing and the doer were observed by no one.

While some thought there was no certainty that the “Lion” had fired the shot, most were convinced that he and none other had done it, the very mystery of the affair conducing to and strengthening their convictions.

But where was he—the “Lion?” Who saw any one leave, as though having a sudden call outside? No one. The mystery was beyond solving.

CHAPTER IV.

JOE BRICE’S GANG—THE “CRICKET.”

ACROSS the way from the Melodeon, down the street a little, is another popular resort, where festivity reigns after dark, and liberty runs to riot.

“The Cricket” is the chirping name it bears, and a lively, chirpy place it is, being a combination of dance hall and a variety theater.

General Crook, the Indian fighter, with officers of lesser grade, and the “first citizens” of Deadwood, have “tripped the light fantastic toe,” within the walls of the “Cricket,” to the seductive strains of a violin and viola; and thither we take the reader, confident that he will not disdain to tread the floor on which General Crook has *chassezed* and cut “pigeon wings.”

The “theater” has two entrances, one to the “pit” the other to the “gallery,” that latter having seven divisions or “boxes.”

The place is filled with a noisy audience of masculines, and the air thick and heavy with pipe and segar smoke, while the clinking of glasses is continual.

We will take the reader into the box-gallery, and with our invisible cape covering him, enter the box on the extreme left occupied by two men, who, as we enter, are joined by a third.

If we were to hazard anything on their occupation, it would be that their bread was not earned by the sweat of their brows, or in any other legitimate way.

We might be mistaken, but we shall see.

Right behind the two men the third seats himself, and we hear him say in an undertone to one of them?

“By the great horn spoon, Joe, that ar cuss is yer—the ‘Lion!’”

“The devil yer say!” ejaculated the one addressed as “Joe,” the other simply exclaiming:

“Yer don’t say so?”

“Yes, that’s so, Joe,” the first speaker went on to say; “an’ some of us mout be left handed afore two days is over, mebbe, if we tackle the Sidney coach.”

“How d’ye know he’s yer, Dave?” queried Joe, with no little interest. “Who’s seen him?”

“I mout not be able ter say who, cap, but over yonder, jest now, Roarin’ Sam was shot in the wrist jest as he dropped his man fur callin’ him a thief; an’ as nobody could find the plugger, it’s nuggits ter buttons ther ‘Lion’ done it—he kin make hisself invisible’n he can stop bullets—”

“Chaw off yer tongue, yer dod-rotted ass, Dave Plum!” ejaculated Joe, or “Cap,” as Dave had called him, breaking in; “what’re yer givin’ us erbout makin’ hisself invisible an’ stoppin’ bullets? He can’t do it—it’s agin natur, I tell yer.”

“It mout be as he can’t do it, but howsomever, he does do it—stop bullits. Who kin shoot him? Thar’s lots of ‘em as has tried it on, an’ is weepin’ an’ wailin’ an’ gnashin’ their teeth.”

“Who kin shoot him? Wait till I strike his trail,” said Joe, “an’ I’ll show him he kin be shot like a buzzard kin.”

“That’s what Pete Stover tho’t, an’ Long Tom,

too; an’ thar’s lots on ‘em take water, an’ cotton to ther ‘Lion’ sweet. I tell yer he’s onnat’ral, cap, an’ can’t be shot.”

“I don’t care if he’s er onnat’ral as a boggy, I kin shoot him—”

At this instant “Jimmy” and his “pard”—the one who pulled on him a little while before—entered the box and sat down, the first on the right, the second on the left of Dave Plum.

“S’pose yer’ve hearn, cap,” said Jimmy, “about Roarin’ Sam bein’ spiled for all useful doin’s, eh? He’ll have ter be sot up fur a ornymment now, as Long Tom an’ them others is.”

“Dave war tellin’ me,” responded the “cap,” “an’ says that er cuss—that er bantam which they call the ‘Lion’—done it, an’ couldn’t be dropped onto. But who knows as how he done it?”

“Thar’s no doubt on’t, cap, that ‘twar him. Nobody else could vamoose so lightnin’ quick. An’ the puzzle is whar’d he get to? It beats them harlequiners like a quarter hoss would beat a road plug. An’ I hearn that he goes down on the Sidney stage ter-morrer, too. If so he does—”

“That ar a stall o’ Saulsbury’s,” broke in the “cap,” “ter give us the goose. That ar stage’ll take down nigh onto \$20,000, in dust ‘n’ nuggits, an’ who wouldn’t take his chances agen that ar bantam fur that much o’ gold all dug for ‘em?”

“An’ three guards,” suggested Jimmy.

“Wal, that’s on’y four agen ten on us.”

“Nine—Roarin’ Sam ar counted out.”

“Wal, nine—nine ter four. Who takes water?” And the “cap” looked at Dave, who said, “I don’t, fur a cent!” “Nor I,” was echoed, respectively by the others, all birds of a feather.

“Skin me alive, if I wouldn’t give ter-morrer’s find ter git a crack at this ar boy with the magic hide,” spoke up the “cap,” “an’ ther Monks ‘n’ ther Plugs order see me square on’t.”

“Mebbe they mout, if yer plugged him cold,” said Dave in a tone that bespoke his doubts concerning the ability of the “cap,” to do the thing he mentioned.

“Wal, I don’t b’lieve Joe Brice’ll lose his eyesight an’ miss his aim, like others hev, when he collides with this ‘Lion,’ es they call him. But come, we’ve got ter do twenty-five or thirty miles afore sun up. Let’s git.”

Upon this the party of five vacated the box, and left the theater.

The conversation carried on by them had been in an undertone, for the most part; and what with the noise in the place, the drift of it could hardly have been made out by the occupants of the adjoining box, had they been quiet, which they were not, being, with one exception, a party of “tender feet” (fresh arrivals in the Hills), who were “putting in” their first night in Deadwood, and “putting it in solid,” as the garish Hebe, who was continually going and coming in their service, expressed it.

The one exception noted, was a young fellow with a slouched hat, very dark face, slovenly dressed, who lay over against the partition dividing the box he was in, from that into which we took the reader, and who was asleep all the time the five were conversing.

The noise of their leaving aroused him, however, when he got up, sleepily rubbed his eyes, and left his seat and the box, reaching the dance hall a few feet in rear of the five, still rubbing his eyes, and apparently not half awake.

CHAPTER V.

CONFAB IN THE I. X. L. HOTEL.—UNCLE AND NEPHEW.

HALF an hour later, in a bedroom in the I. X. L. Hotel (private parlors were not then established in Deadwood), were seated two men, one of whom was Mr. Saulsbury, stage proprietor, and the other a young man fashionably dressed, and looking like one just from the east on a visit of curiosity to the Black Hills.

The two had just entered the room as we introduce the reader therein, and the first to speak was Mr. Saulsbury.

“Well, my boy, will you start on the trip to Sidney to-morrow?”

“I will.”

“Ah, ha! Then I may conclude that the stage will—”

“Go through all right, sir,” broke in the young man, in a confident tone, begging the other’s pardon for the interruption.

The gentleman laughed.

“I was going to say,” said he, “that the stage would be attacked.”

“That remains to be seen, sir.”

“I hear that Joe Brice, Jimmy, and the gang are in town.”

"I hear so. In fact, I know so."
 "That's for a blind, I suppose."
 "No doubt."
 "One of the gang—Roaring Sam, they call him—I heard was shot to-night, and by the 'Lion,' they say."
 "He was shot, certainly; but they attribute the shooting to a certain party, simply because —"

"I understand," broke in old Saulisbury, in turn begging the pardon of the other for interrupting him, and pointing significantly to his own wrist. "Were you about much to-night?" he then asked.

"I dropped into the Melodeon, and then went over to the Cricket and fell asleep in the theater. Most any one would have thought I was asleep," the young man added, after a momentary pause.

"Humph! I needn't ask any questions, I suppose; I agreed not to. Well, shall you go over as one of the guard, or as a passenger?"

"Passenger, or else, in case of an attack, the bandits might not be able to tell who fired certain shots, and might hunt the guard afterwards."

"You are generously considerate, young man," said the stage proprietor; "noble as the lion is popularly supposed to be," the tone and glance of the speaker being significant.

"How much dust do you send over to-morrow?" queried the other, waiving compliments.

"Close on to \$20,000. A great temptation to robbers."

"I hope they will be tempted. But how is it that certain gentlemen of the road got wind of my going over to-morrow? It was to be kept secret."

"I am sure I can't tell—is it so?"

"Well, possibly I may have dreamed it when I was asleep in the theater," said the young fellow, looking significantly at the other, who understood the look. "It doesn't matter," he continued, "only if it be generally known, there will be a crowd of curious ones around the stage at starting, and I don't fancy being gaped at. Now I think of it, let us be uncle and nephew up to the time of starting. I'm a young student—your nephew, Tom Tucker—just come in from the Big Horn country, now on my return east—savey?"

"A good idea, my boy; and now, although I would like to ask you some questions—contraband—I will desist and retire, sharing your confidence, which is so assuring, in the safe arrival of the stage at Sidney. But one thing I hope you will tell me some day, the secret of your immunity from the bullets of these desperadoes. Of course I know there is nothing of the supernatural about it—charmed life, and that sort of thing—though I affect to believe in the mysterious where you are spoken of. You will tell me some day, eh?"

"Perhaps," replied the young man, smiling. "But I will tell you now that the mystery does not lie in a coat of chain mail, as I have heard, among other things," and with a laugh, the speaker bade the other good-night, and left the room.

The words of Mr. Saulisbury revealed the identity of his companion, who was none other, as our readers have surmised, than the "Lion," and Lance.

Outside the hotel, a few moments after quitting Mr. Saulisbury's room, Lance was met by an individual, who said to him in an undertone:

"About ten miles north o' French Creek Ranch. Thar'll be nine of us. See me at Chugwater, Sunday, at 'Portuguese' Phillips. Over the river."

The next instant the man, who was no other than Dave Plum, was lost in the darkness.

CHAPTER VI.

THE TREASURE-LADEN STAGE—THE ATTACK.

THE Sidney stage, carrying \$20,000 in gold dust, drawn by six good horses, driven by a skillful "whip," taking along three well-armed guards, was ready for the start.

The next morning, a young fellow, in a travel-stained suit of grey, wearing blue glasses, and carrying a cane and field-glass, mounted the box alongside of the driver, after embracing affectionately, his uncle, Mr. Saulisbury, receiving from the latter a small but handsomely mounted revolver as a means of defense, and souvenir of his trip to the Black Hills, from which locality he was destined for the east.

"Good-by, Tom, my boy!" said Mr. Saulisbury to the young fellow, as the driver flung his whip-lash over his head, and terminated the

flourish with a smart snap; "good-by, and stick to your studies well."

"Good-by, uncle, good-by! I'll do it," was the response, as the treasure-laden stage rolled away along Deadwood Gulch, where, for eight miles stretches the city of Deadwood.

All that day it rolled on towards Sidney, meeting with no impediments but those which the rough road offered.

The bouncing, jolting journey was resumed the second day, and up three P. M. nothing occurred that would have occasioned the slightest uneasiness to the most timid lady; and "Tom," the "nephew" of Mr. Saulisbury, professed to be disappointed that the journey was so "stupidly devoid of romance," as he expressed himself, when some twelve miles north of French Creek Ranch.

"Romance!" ejaculated the driver, with a sneer; "if the cusses tackle us, yer'll find a bloody lot o' romance about it! It'll be a racket that'll make yer think o' yer mammy, an' wish yer was to home."

"I'd like to get a shot at a bandit once," said the young fellow, pulling out his handsome revolver; "it would sound so romantic to tell of; I would like to have the stage attacked, if the guards and I could beat them off—I'm a pretty good shot, I tell you."

"Ha-ha-ha!" roared the driver. "The guards 'n' I, is good. Ha-ha-ha! Good shot, be you? Yer mout be at home, shootin' at targits. But jest yer wait till them targits is live road agents goin' fur gold. Whew! They wouldn't mind that ar' little pop squint o' yourn, more'n they would a sody water bottle; an' ye'd be too flabbergasted ter shoot, anyhow."

"Do you think I would be afraid?" queried the other, a trifle nervously.

"Yer mout be, 'n' yer mout not be; but it's likelier that yer mout be, than yer moutn't be," sagely rejoined the driver.

Crack—crack—crack!

"Gracious! what's that?" very nervously ejaculated the young fellow, hurriedly disposing of his pistol deep in his pocket.

The driver lashed his horses, but down went one of them shot through the head, eight or nine armed desperadoes then appearing on the scene.

"Hold yer mules thar, Sam!" called out their leader, (none other than "Cap" Joe)—"hold yer mules, or down goes yer pertishin. Mout as well s'rrender. It's nine ter three."

Crack—crack! went two of the guard's revolvers.

"Nine to four!" cried out Lance, in a youthful, ringing voice, a shot immediately emphasizing his words, when the battle with the bandits boldly began.

That ringing and defiant cry was accompanied with a shot from a revolving carbine fired by the young fellow in grey, who had produced the weapon as if by magic, and who no longer looked through blue glasses, like a weak-eyed, unsophisticated youth, but like a roused lion who would rule the fray.

"Ho—ho—ho!" roared the leader of the bandits, derisively. "So yer count yerself in fer one, do yer?"

"Eight to four!" was the young fellow's response, as a pistol fell from the hand of one of the bandits at whom he had shot, and from whose terribly-mangled wrist the blood gushed freely forth.

"The 'Lion'—the 'Lion!'" cried out the wounded bandit, with a howl of anguish and a frightful oath.

"Fire—shoot that ar cub, every one of yer!" roared the leader, Joe Brice, and raised his pistol. "Cowards 'n' curs! whar yer goin' to?" he the next instant exclaimed, and fired at one of three of his gang, who, at the cry of the "Lion," from their wounded comrade, incontinently fled from the scene.

Three shots from the bandits followed that of their chief, and three from the guards. Down went one of the former, while one of the latter, wounded, let fall his carbine to the ground.

"Four to three—no odds!" cried Lance, for he it was, and sent a whistling bullet through the ear of Brice.

What with reports of carbines and pistols, and the loud and frightful oaths of the raging bandit chief, there was "music in the air." Then the robbers, dodging here and there after firing, and the plunging and kicking of the frightened horses, all in a tangled bunch around the leader that lay kicking and dying, the driver clinging to the reins and doing the best he could—all combined to form a stirring scene, replete with action, romance and danger.

A fearful oath the bandit chief roared out, clapping his hand to his left ear, as he felt the hot sting of the whistling bullet.

"Shoot that ar cub—shoot, all o' yer," he cried, firing, as he spoke, at our hero, whose flashing eyes were upon him.

Though the bandits, as well as the two remaining guards, had kept up a continual fusillade, with no further casualties than we have mentioned, yet there seemed to be a distinct response from the weapons of the former, to the behest of their chief, every pistol being aimed at the undaunted Lance, the only cool-headed and self-possessed one in the fight, and who thus far had fired but two shots.

Bullets whistled passed him, but none hit him, the bandit chief missing him as well as his men.

"Lost your eyesight, haven't you, cap?" our hero said to the raging bandit; and then to the driver, loudly and contemptuously, for the ears of the robbers: "These fellows can't shoot any, and as they might hit you firing at me, I'll get down," saying which he went like a cat from the box to the ground, and some fifteen feet to the left of the stage, the bandits firing and missing, while the chief roared and cursed with rage in consequence of the failure of his men to hit the mark at which all were firing, to the exclusion of the guards.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FIGHT GOES ON—THE BANDITS BEATEN.

"WHY don't yer hit him yerself?" cried Jimmy, firing as he spoke. "You war goin' to work wonders an' dish up mirrykles when you struck his trail," and again he fired.

"Thar—how's that?" he exclaimed, as the bullet from his pistol went through the hat of our hero.

"Close enough," cried the latter, and quick as lightning drew a bead on the bandit and fired.

"Holy Moses!" exclaimed the latter, bouncing three feet from the ground, his wrist shattered and his pistol falling from his hand. "Holy mack'rill!" he again ejaculated, coming to the ground, "the cuss hez winged me. The devil take him!"

Stooping, he picked his pistol from the ground with his left hand, cocked it, and fired at Lance.

It was a wild shot, and the bullet went wide of its mark.

"Three to three," sung out our hero, "and I've a dozen shots left."

"Shoot the guards—shoot the guards!" cried the exasperated chief, who was on the other side of the stage when our hero alighted, but who now bounded around the horses to the opposite side, firing at Lance the moment he got around.

"Fire at the guards!" he again exclaimed, "I'll fix this devil's cub," meaning our hero.

The only two men who had remained unhurt were only too glad to change the direction of their fire, hoping thereby to escape the unerring bullets of our hero, who would be occupied with their chief, and did so at once, dodging around the plunging horses, the duel opening hotly, as far as firing was concerned; the guards, who had been watching our hero, and neglecting their fire, now realizing the fact that they were the special targets of two of the bandits, and acting accordingly.

A lucky shot brought down one of the latter almost immediately, which, being noticed by our hero, he cried out:

"Three to two!"

"Yer lie!" roared Jimmy, "it's three ter three—I'm good yit," and fired at Lance with his left hand, the distance between them being about twelve feet.

The instant after he went to earth, his right knee shattered by a shot from our hero's carbine.

"How is it now?" queried Lance, whose flashing glance instantly reverted to the chief, who had stooped to pick a pistol from the ground, he having exhausted the two he carried.

Examining it quickly, he sprang forward, leveled and fired at Lance, exclaiming:

"That's how it's! an' that—an' that—an'—"

Only a snap—the cartridges were exhausted—and the robber chief, now entirely at mercy of Lance, whom he had missed in his frenzy, not one of his three shots taking effect, stood with mouth agape and eyes staring with wonder at the handsome young fellow before him, whose eyes seemed to consume him, and who stood like one gazing upon some awe-striking phantom.

In the meantime, revolvers cracked and carbines rung, two of the latter against four of the former, all but one of the bandits keeping up the fire, that one being Jimmy, and all but two lying on the ground, one of the latter firing from behind the body of the mortally wounded off leader of the team, not yet dead.

But to Lance and the bandit chief.

"Go," said the former to the latter, "and go quickly. Your band is broken—a part fled, and the rest crippled—and you owe your life to me. I save it because of one good deed of your doing that I know of. Go, but give up this robber life, or you and I may meet again."

"Never after this day!" cried the robber, his face, red as it ever was, flushing to a deep scarlet with fiendish rage, kindled at the thought that he, one of the most dreaded of Dakota's desperadoes, should owe his life to the young man before him—a mere stripling.

As he uttered these words, he quickly produced a long Spanish knife, a formidable weapon, and sprang for our hero, hissing out:

"If cold Yankee lead won't touch yer, I'll give yer hot Spanish steel!" and his spring was like that of a maddened tiger.

But lighter and quicker was that of our hero, who, with the celerity of the nimble chamois, leaped ten feet to the right, having his carbine cocked and leveled by the time the baffled bandit recovered and faced him.

"Fool!" he cried, "you have neither discretion, gratitude nor sense. Suffer the consequences!"

He fired, and the desperado dropped to earth with a torn and shattered knee, but in falling he hurled the murderous Spanish knife with all his strength and ferocity at our hero, and with so true an aim, that it struck and cut through the skirt of his coat, and firmly imbedded its point in the hub of one of the hind wheels of the coach.

Crack—crack! went our hero's carbine, and one bullet went crashing through the bandit's right wrist, the other tearing and smashing through his left elbow, which, as he was supporting himself on his left arm, destroyed that prop, and let him down upon the earth flat on his back, the most terrible imprecations escaping his lips.

With those two shots, the battle with the bandits ended; the chief and all his men wounded, the former as utterly helpless as a new-born babe, and as powerless for harm.

The guards would have dispatched the wounded robber, but our hero would not allow them; but he did allow them to strip the scoundrels of their arms, and everything else of value; and as a memento of the fight, he took himself the Spanish knife that had been hurled at him by the robber chief, meeting with no little trouble in freeing it from the wheel.

Half an hour, and the Sidney stage, with its treasure of \$20,000, was again on its way, five horses drawing it in place of six; the guards (one wounded rather seriously) and the driver, richer from the attempt to rob the stage, by a not inconsiderable sum in gold, taken from the robbers, to say nothing of fire-arms, etc.

When the stage rolled off it left three bandits lying on the ground, and three whose hurts did not prevent them moving about; and from the lips of one the former, Joe Brice, rolled forth oaths and curses, like lava from a volcano in eruption.

CHAPTER VIII.

A CHEYENNE VARIETIES—FORCING A DRINK.

THE scene now lies in Cheyenne. The immediate locality, the principal and most popular "house of entertainment." Date, the Saturday following the attack on the Sidney stage.

The establishment is quite pretentious, having a stage for variety performances, with boxes above the ground floor, bars and tables, at the latter of which, most any kind of game can be indulged in; in short, just such a place as frontier "civilization" demanded, licensed by the authorities, and very similar to the "Melodeon" at Deadwood.

It is ten o'clock in the evening, and the place is in "full blast."

On the ground floor there is a constantly circulating and motley mob of miners, ranchmen, soldiers, herders, cowboys, Black Hills freighters, bummers, gamblers, etc., including "blanket Indians," and Chinamen; while in the boxes above there are officers, tourists, rich ranchers, and Black Hillers with money to spend, who sip their wine at five dollars a pint bottle, and take in the moving scene below them.

Out from the crowd of players around a faro table breaks a red-shirted, red-faced, stalwart, and hard-looking fellow, with his big, dirty hands full of gold, which he had won on the turn of a card, and which, save a few pieces, he dropped into his pockets.

Right in his path, as he made his way to the nearest bar, of which there were several on the

spacious floor, stood a young man of slight build and delicate features, who evidently was out of place in that company, and who looked to be in trouble.

"Halloo, younster," was his salute; "how d'ye do, mout I ask? Come, I've struck ile ter-night, an' don't mind a treat. Come erlong, we'll have some cham."

"Excuse me, I don't wish to drink," said the young man, politely, and turned away to be grabbed the next instant by the other, who said, in an ugly way:

"Don't thank any one for what yer don't git. I took a notion ter ask yer ter join me in a social drink, an' by Jeems Rice, yer've got ter drink!"

"I never drink," said the young fellow, nervously, striving to get away from his rough custodian.

"Ho—ho—ho!" roared the latter. "You never drink, eh? What! not wine? Whater yer doin' round here in Cheyenne, then? Set down here, I tell yer;" and the speaker forced the young man to a chair, all who noticed the act laughing and gathering around.

"Now yer'll see some fun," said one of the lookers-on to another. "Luke'll never'll let up on him, you bet."

The face of the young fellow, who was indignant and fearful, flushed and paled by turns, and it was evident that he felt extremely ill at ease.

The rough fellow ordered a bottle of wine, and invited two or three of his kidney to sit down, and these did not decline.

The wine was soon brought, but the entertainer said he would open it when he "got good and ready."

The throng about the table increased every moment, for the incident was a pleasing one to those present.

The same thing—one man forcing another into a chair, determined that he shall drink with him—would draw a crowd about a table in Delmonico's.

Every one laughed, while many chaffed the uncomfortable young fellow unmercifully, which caused his face to glow and his ears to tingle, as the shafts of coarse wit and humor were let fly at him.

"Keep easy like, young 'un," said the frontiersman, placing his huge paw upon the shoulder of his captive, who was quite restive under his eye and the fire of raillery all about him; "keep easy, but if yer can't keep easy, keep as easy as yer kin," which remark, of course, elicited a laugh from the throng of lookers on, who were impatient for the "performance" to begin, as anyone could see.

"Cut the strings, Luke, why don't yer?" spoke up a rough ranchman, "an' give the kid a drink; he must feel dry."

"Yes, what do yer want ter aggravate him fur?" said another, at both of which remarks the crowd laughed—crowds laugh easily when in a laughing mood.

"Hold on a minute," returned the "master of ceremonies," and then to his unwilling guest he said: "Young 'un, whar'd yer come from, anyhow? Whar, mebbe, are yer goin' to? What's yer little racket, eh?"

"Why do you want to know?" asked the young fellow; "you care nothing about me, and why can't you dispense with my company? There are others here—"

"Pop," went the cork, Luke having cut the string, and the young man said no more.

"Yer see, young 'un," said the frontiersman, pouring out the wine, "I've got a purty good reputation all 'long the line—hain't I, boys? an' yer needn't be 'shamed ter drink with Larfin' Luke—yer mout hev heard o' Larfin' Luke! No? Wal, 'tain't no matter, others hev. Now, then, young 'un, here's ter ther queen dance—savey? Thar's yer wine. What! do yer presume ter decline ter drink with Larfin' Luke—an' wine at that?"

The young fellow had pushed the wine back; but thinking, probably, that compliance would be better than stubborn resolution just then, and hoping, no doubt, to get clear of his too-pressing entertainer, nervously seized his brimming glass and (spilling a portion of the wine accidentally, as he carried it to his lips), drained it as he would water, nearly strangling himself in his haste.

Choking, coughing, and spluttering, he got to his feet and sought to break through the ring of lookers-on, but not a man gave way—all had hoped to "see some fun," and not having seen enough, refused to budge.

"Set down, young 'un, an' have another glass," said Luke, who reached and clutched the young fellow, and again forced him into the chair, involuntary tears, caused by strangulation,

rolling from his eyes. "Have another glass; the most o' that got down yer windpipe, an' yer didn't git a taste on't in yer gullet."

The by-standers applauded—they would "see some fun" yet.

"Come, thar's wine, young 'un. Drink her down—drink her down—down—down!"

"I can't drink any more," said the young fellow, coughing—"I don't want any more."

"Yer must—I never let a friend off that way, young 'un."

"I won't drink any more—ask somebody else. There's plenty here who will drink with you."

"Snakes an' sarpints, yer w-o-n't? But you will, now!"

As he spoke, the ruffian tipped off the young fellow's hat, caught him by the hair at the back of his head with his left hand, took a glass of wine in his right, and holding it to his victim's lips, ordered him to drink it on pain of having it poured down his throat.

The young fellow made the best of it—he drank off the wine, while the bystanders laughed and cheered, the spectacle amusing them greatly.

"You done that like a little man—young 'un!" said the frontiersman, approvingly. "Bring us another bottle—nuthin' mean about me, young 'un;" at which the crowd applauded.

"Now, then, young 'un," said the latter's too pressing host, when the waiter, getting back, had opened the wine and filled the glasses; "now, then, young 'un, yer's to a short life 'n a merry one!"

"For God's sake let me go!" exclaimed the young man, appealingly. "I can't drink any more."

"You can't but you will!" the ruffian drawled, with a coarse laugh and ribald jest; then taking a revolver from his belt, he pointed it at the young man's head, drawing:

"Thar's yer wine—drink it! My repertation 'll suffer, young 'un, if yer don't—"

"Your miserable carcass will suffer, unless you lower that pistol!" broke in a bold, round, ringing voice at this juncture: the voice coming from a tall young man, in a bright buckskin suit, whose figure was superb, and whose face, with its indomitable look, large and bright brown eyes, was strikingly handsome; who had forced himself inside the cordon of lookers-on surrounding the bully and his victim, and who stood with the gleaming barrel of a large revolver aimed at the wrist of the bully's pistol hand.

"Better lay down your hand, Luke," advised a tall man in the crowd, who carried his right arm in a sling; "thar's a better hand out than 'll chaw yours all ter pieces!"

Luke turned, as he was obliged to do, in order to get a look at the audacious interloper who had interfered with his amusement; and, as a matter of course, his weapon changed its position, the muzzle of the other following his wrist.

His surprise was so great at seeing one so young and handsome—one whom nature had fitted for the society and admiration of the gentler sex, and not for rude contact and companionship with the offscourings of a nation in a lawless region—his surprise was so great, at finding himself so boldly confronted and audaciously threatened, by one who should have shown in a Fifth avenue drawing-room, rather than figure in a Cheyenne gambling hell, that he, the desperate frontiersman, was rendered absolutely speechless for a few moments, without power to utter a word.

CHAPTER IX.

LANCER THE LION—BILL BLOOD.

At length Laughing Luke found his speech, and in a tone of mingled sarcasm and insolence, said:

"Wal, my parlor plant—my wax doll—whar'd yer come from? Who mout yer be, anyhow?"

"It doesn't matter who I am," was the dauntless reply, quietly uttered.

"Do yer know who I mout be, stranger? I'm Larfin' Luke—"

"Called by some, Laughing Hyena," broke in the bold young man. "Put up your pistol—mine is a hair trigger."

These words called the attention of Luke to the other's weapon, which he noticed for the first time, apparently, was aimed at his wrist.

"Snakes 'n' pizen—pizen 'n' snakes!" he exclaimed, in a tone devoid of all belligerency; then, looking the handsome young fellow all over, asked: Be you him?" and answered the query himself: "Yer can't be him—yer too young and peart."

"Don't make no mistake, Luke—that's him,

sure!" interposed the man with his arm in a sling.

"Draw off yer guns, youngster, I park my artillery to onct," said Luke, rising and putting up his weapon, the other disposing of his also.

"The Lion," boys—boys, this is the "Lion!"

This was Luke's introduction of the handsome young fellow to the spectators, and of the latter to the former.

"The 'Lion'—the 'Lion?'" was echoed and re-echoed from all quarters; and a simultaneous rush took place, every one making for the locality where the "lion of the hour" stood already encompassed by a cordon of frontiersmen, of the types we have named, scores of the same rushing up, the boxes pouring forth a higher grade of humanity—somewhat.

"Bulge out yer," cried a voice; and the circle enlarged from its original dimension, giving all a good view of the handsome young fellow who had awed and cowed a desperado, in a den where desperadoes met and desperate deeds were by no means infrequent; thereby putting a stop to the desperado's "bit of fun."

Of the powers of the young fellow in their midst, all had heard—some had been talking that evening of his late exploit, as well as stories of his marvelous escapes from the bullets shot at him by men of truest aim; and all regarding him with the greatest interest, while many, not excepting the coarsest and roughest characters looked, not only with wonderment, but awe, upon the tall, erect, and handsome young man, who seemed like a magnificent gem thrown in among ill-looking and worthless scraps.

"Boys," said the man with his right arm in a sling, after Luke's introduction, stepping up to the young man's side—"boys, this is the young 'un wich nobody kin shoot, wich kin kill an' don't kill, but only smashes the shootin' wrist of them as goes fur him, or goes fur any one else outer the squar way, when he's 'round, (a voice—"bully fur him.") The 'Lion'—yer've all heard about his layin' out Joe Brice's gang, four days ago—got the name six months ago on the road to the hills, when the stage was tackled by eight of 'em agents yer know, an' he fou't 'em off, sendin' every bloody one of 'em away left handed, when he might jest as well laid 'em out cold. Johnson, the banker, in this yer place, give him the name, but some of us call him 'The Wonder,' 'n' some 'The Terror.' He ain't afeard of nothin' nor nobody, an' 's bullet proof. I know what I'm talkin' about, fur I sent six bullets for him—I tho't he was interfer'n with business of mine, an' ev'ry bullet was sent to kill, but didn't. An' thar's Pete Stover—he's poison with a 'volver—he'll swar his Alfie Davy on a stack o' bibles an' a pile o' tombstones, that he emptied a par o' 'volvers at him an' couldn't hit him, but went off left handed. Yer've got the bulge on us all, young 'un, yer have, sure. 'Tain't nat'ral—tain't in the regular run o' the keards, but yer've got it. Yer life's charmed 'gainst bullets. Yer made me left handed, young 'un, but yer mouter left me in the hills, and I'm yer friend from date—if so be yer mout hev any friends. There's my left-shake."

"Certainly! there's my right, put it there," said the young fellow, as he extended his right hand.

A round of cheers went out from the lookers-on, as the two shook hands, and had hardly subsided when the circle broke, all rushing in to "shake" the paw of the "Lion."

Laughing Luke, a desperado with a record—a "record" of a dozen alleged murders—who had received the epithet he bore on account of his peculiar laughter when about to "plug his man," and after the deed, was about the fortieth man to offer his hand to the "Lion," receiving a satisfying shake.

"I've hearn o' yer, young un," said he; "the Plugs o' the Plains, an' the Monks o' the Mountains hev all hearn o' yer, but I didn't think yer war so right peart as yer are. Yer purty's a pictur, an' yer eyes—would yer keep 'em orfer me fur a minit—they burn right into a feller—never seed the like. Mebbe ye've come across Bill Blood; he's a Monk. No? Wal, I know him. He's jest pison with the pistol, an' so be 'f it's eny good fur yer to know, he's layin' fur yer. Wonder, an' swars he'll larn if flesh is flesh an' bullets is bullets—savey? So be, mebbe, 'tain't no good fur yer to know it; but Larfin' Luke, wich he owes yer one for savin' his right bower, an' not leavin' him to play the left, tells yer—an' no good, no harm. He swars he'll empty his two pepper boxes at yer, an' then give it up that flesh ain't flesh, and bullets ain't bullets if yer don't go under!"

Our hero nodded and smiled.

"Thank you, Luke," said he. "If this Bill

Blood—I have heard of him often—is laying for me, it is well enough to know it."

"Ho—ho—ho! what fur, if yer've got a charmed life, young Terror?"

A red-shirted, coarse-looking, freckled-faced fellow, wearing a slouched hat, high boots, in the top of which were stuck his trousers, a moment after these words were uttered, stood face to face with the "Lion" and Luke, the latter of whom exclaimed:

"Shoot me, 'f 'tain't Bill Blood, hisself!"

"Yer jest size me, Luke, it's me, you bet! An' so be this young 'un's the Terror, eh? The 'Lion,' ez some calls him. He's a right peart boy, ain't he? An' you fools, yer think he's bullet proof, eh? Ho—ho—ho! Say, you—Long Tom—I know yer (he spoke to the man with his arm in the sling), do you pretend to say you wasted six bullets on the young 'un? Cos I knows yer allus hed the dead-drop on them, is the reason I ask."

"Yer don't mean to insinuate that I'd lie?" spoke up the man addressed, bringing forth a revolver with his left hand.

"No, nuthin,' Tom, on'y it's queer, derved queer!" the other said, and turned to the young man again. "Why, he's flesh an' bone an' blood like you an' me, Tom an' all of us. D'yer say bullets won't bite o' that flesh o' his'n? Ho—ho—ho! Re-dicklus—re-dicklus!" and the speaker disengaged one of the two revolvers he carried in his belt, a score of others in the crowd drawing like weapons, our hero included.

"Come, 'Lion,'" said the ruffian, glaring at the central figure of the crowd; "come, 'Lion,' give us yer paw—yer've be'n pumpin' permiscus around—give us yer paw," and he held out his left hand.

"No, not to you," returned the dauntless young man. "I have given my hand to many, but none of them addressed me as they would a dog," and the big brown eyes of the speaker dilated widely, and shot forth a flash of such intensity that all who caught it felt its power, while the desperado, at whom it was especially shot, quailed and cowed before the strange, peculiar light that flashed into and quenched the glare of his own eyes.

Shunning the gaze, in a rage, he cried, raising his revolver:

"Stan' back, thar—stan' back—all you as don't want'er git shot. If so be this yer Terror (the speaker, catching the glance of the young man at this moment, rubbed his eyes as though they were "sticks" in them) if this yer 'Lion' is bullet-proof, no harm'll be done; if he ain't, he'll get shot for sartin."

Before he was done speaking, he was covered by a score of revolvers, while the weapon in the hands of the one most interested hung in his hand, muzzle down, though the fire of his eye was directed towards the ruffian, Blood.

"Don't yer shoot the boy," warned Long Tom.

"Yer mout do better," said Luke, the pistols of both covering Bill.

"I cave," said the latter, taking in the situation. "I cave for the time bein', but I'll put the Wonder to the test for sartin some time."

He put up his pistol as he spoke, the others doing the same, while those who, having stood in range of various weapons, and scattered, now gathered in again upon the principals in the affair, the cynosure of all eyes being the "Lion."

"If so be you b'lieve this boy is bullet proof," continued Bill, "an' can't be shot, whad' yer chip in so lively fur, on his account—eh? Why didn't yer let me shoot at him? I couldn't hurt him any—could I?"

"That's so," spoke up one of the crowd, who had been converted by Bill's logic to his way of thinking. "If bullets won't tech the boy, let's hev a shot—them as wants ter shoot."

"That's my idee, too," put in another; "it'll be fun fur us, an' fun fur the boy."

A score of men, who, a moment before, would have shot to protect the handsome young fellow, were now fumbling about their belts, and would have shot at him, while some had their pistols in their hands.

CHAPTER X.

THE RUFFIAN "REDEYE"—THE STRANGE DUEL.

"No shootin' the boy 'cept as he be willin'," spoke up Laughing Luke, cocking his pistol. "It must be in duel fashion, or no shoot, an' I'll second the young 'un."

"Nothin' short o' them terms," followed Long Tom, with weapon ready. "Thar's nothin' to shoot the boy fur, an' he's got to have fair play."

"He smashed the wrist of my pard, an' I've got suthin' to shoot fur," spoke up a villainous-looking, red-eyed scoundrel, pistol in hand.

"Then you shoot first," spoke up the dauntless Lance, again pulling forth his revolver, and sending a lightning-like flash from his wondrous eyes into the red orbs of the other, fifteen feet away, perhaps.

"I'll second you, pard," said Bill Blood to the red-eyed desperado, known as "Redeye," stepping to the latter's side.

"Ten paces—face to face—pistols at side—fire at word," suggested Long Tom. "Does that suit?"

Looking at his principal, who nodded agreement, Laughing Luke said:

"We're agreed," Bill Blood saying:

"It suits us."

Immediately the spectators formed themselves in two lines, making a line about eight feet wide; when the measurement was made, the principals placed, and the singular duel was on, no attention being given to the weapons—it was a snap match, at catch weights, so to speak.

From the instant the two were placed, our hero fastened his wondrously gleaming eye upon his antagonist, and such a light flashed out from them—such a gleam of wondrous intensity and magnetic power—as never before met the eyes of those who caught the flash and were held by it unable to avert their gaze.

"The word will be go," said Long Tom, who assumed the direction of affairs; "after a count of one, two."

A moment, and he uttered the premonitory word—"Ready," then after a moment's pause:

"One—two—go!"

Instantly at the word, the pistols of the two combatants came to the horizontal; when flash—crack! went that of Redeye's, and whiz-z-z went the bullet; but no flash, no report from the weapon of the other, and no snap of the hammer—he did not fire!

"Snakes 'n' sarpints!" exclaimed Laughing Luke, surprised and annoyed at the action, or rather nonaction of his principal, who stood smiling and uninjured, as he dropped his undischarged weapon to his side. "Snakes 'n' sarpints—why didn't you shoot?"

"Never you mind, Luke," returned the young man, calmly.

"Are you satisfied, Redeye?" queried Long Tom.

"No, I ain't," said the desperado, with an oath. "I k'n shoot—"

"He must have another shot, young un," said Tom to our hero, breaking in upon the latter's antagonist: "another shot, unless you take water."

"That's his affair," was returned by the undaunted Lance, pushing up the broad rim of his slouched hat, his eye not for an instant wandering from his antagonist.

"Ready, then," said Tom. "One—two—go!" Flash, crack, from Redeye's pistol, with the whiz-z of the bullet—nothing from the other.

The Lion stood unscathed.

Dropping his weapon as before, he stood smiling and erect, with the mein of a lion, and the eye of Jove, under whose wondrous gaze—magnetic and overpowering—the red-shirted ruffian quailed, and turned his own red orbs aside, cursing and blaspheming at missing a man at thirty feet.

There was a buzz of wonder from the lookers-on, that Redeye, known to be a crack shot, should have failed the second time; a look of awe depicted on the faces of many, as they gazed at the Lion, erect and unharmed, calm and smiling, his potent gaze still fixed upon his antagonist.

"He isn't shot!" ejaculated a score of voices at once, while individual expressions such as the following were heard:

"Wonderful, isn't it?" "He's bullet proof, fur sartin!" "Them ar eyes o' his is enough ter blind a feller!" "Bully fur der 'Lion!'"

"Hundred dollars Redeye can't hit him!" "He's purty's a painted picture!" "His life's charmed, sure!" and other similar remarks.

As for Laughing Luke, he was almost beside himself with annoyance and disgust.

"Snakes an' pizen!" he exclaimed, "why didn't yer shoot; where's the fun of bein' shot at, 'f yer don't shoot back?"

"Satisfied?" queried Long Tom of Redeye—"yer've had two shots at the boy, an' no talk back from him."

"That's his er 'fair—no, I'm not satisfied," roared out the murderous miscreant. "I'll shoot till I—"

"You sha'n't shoot again!" cried out the young man whom our hero had rescued from Luke, springing into the arena, and facing the sanguinary Redeye, much to the surprise of all who had witnessed the scene between him and Laughing Luke. "You shan't shoot again, you brute," he

cried; at which Luke belched out: "Snakes 'n' pizen, but ther critter's got some spunk into him arter all! Who'd a thunk it, ten minutes ago?"

"He must have another shot—an' he shall have!" said Long Tom, ignoring entirely the young fellow.

"Yes, young un'," said Laughing Luke, "you git outer ther way 'n' don't be interferin' with this yer bizness, which is reg'lar duel style, or near as mebbe."

Carried away by excitement, the young fellow sprang upon Redeye, and so suddenly that he took him completely by surprise, and wrested his pistol from him. It was torn from his hands in an instant, however, and he was hustled to the rear of one of the lines and held there in check, the pistol being returned to its owner.

"Snakes 'n' sarpints!" exclaimed Laughing Luke, raging at this demonstration by the young man; "snakes 'n' sarpints, lay the kid under a table some'ers outer ther way."

"Stand aside there," said Lance at this juncture, the lines on either side having broken in somewhat; "he must have another shot, as many as he wants, but one will be sufficient. Stand aside, please."

The lines were instantly reformed, and the two duellists faced one another again, the burning eyes of our hero fixed squarely upon those of his antagonist, who could not stand his gaze, however.

"Ready!" called out Long Tom.

"One moment," said Lance, his words meant for Tom, but his gaze fixed upon Redeye, to whom he then said: "You insist upon the third shot, do you?" emphasizing the word, 'third' in a peculiar manner, and adding: "You have missed me twice; I thought you were a shooter; do you wish to add to such a record by failing again?"

"You gamble I do," roared the ruffian, stung by the taunt, "an' 'f I don't make carrion o' yer carcass, I'll take to drivin' mules on the Deadwood route, you bet."

"I think you will drive mules, then," quietly returned the dauntless Lance; and never for an instant taking his eyes from the sanguinary ruffian, placed himself in position, the other, foaming and furious, doing the same, the faces of the on-lookers showing re-awakened interest in the altogether remarkable affair.

"Ready!" again called out Tom, and after a momentary pause: "One—two—go!"

The ear could distinguish but one report, but there had been two discharges at one and the same instant, followed by the whirr—whirr of two bullets, when immediately there dropped to the floor the pistol of Redeye, from whom came a roar of rage and howl of pain. The ruffian's thumb had been broken and torn nearly off, the bullet tearing thence and crashing into his wrist, ruining that portion of his anatomy forever, as far as pistol practice was concerned.

"Good—good!" cried the young fellow, who had been so demonstrative a moment or two before, as he saw Lance standing all unruffled and unharmed, cool and self-possessed, and with the air of one conscious of superior powers.

"Hurrah! three cheers for the 'Lion!'" shouted another voice in the crowd, when the cheers were given, the lines then breaking, and Lance becoming the center of a surging crowd, all anxious to shake his hand, and all looking at him with undisguised wonderment; not a few showing plainly that they regarded him as one possessing supernatural powers.

"P'raps mebbe you mout hanker now to shoot the young un," said Laughing Luke to Bill Blood, whose eyes fairly bulged from their sockets, as he bent their gaze upon the young fellow who had stood, unscathed, three shots from one always considered "dead sure" with pistol or rifle, but who now must have acknowledged a lost prestige, or admitted what was claimed for the "Lion"—immunity from bullets.

These words of Luke's broke the stare of the other at Lance, and turning to Luke, he said:

"He ain't nat'ral. Thar's no use a shootin' at onnat'ral bein's. If Redeye couldn't hit him, you'n me can't, Luke; that's sartin. I ain't pickin' no quar'ls with sech as him. I don't wantner jine the left-handed brigade, Luke—it's 'cruitin' purty fast—an' go humpin' around with one hand in a sling. No, thank ye, I don't hanker to shoot at him, Luke. I kin do better'n foolin' away powder on sech kind o' liens as he is, an' wonders."

And Bill Blood, so anxious a short time before, to test the virtue of his bullets and trueness of his aim upon the young man who had won the appellation of 'Lion' by his matchless bravery, walked off like one who had nothing to say and very little time to say it in.

Suddenly there was a wild surge of the crowd

about our hero; then a loud cry of warning, as piercing as though uttered by a woman; then a frightful oath and the gleam of a knife; then a pistol shot and a fall; then a terrible roar of rage, and the closing up the crowd about the fallen man, like as the waters close over a sinking object.

The wounded ruffian, Redeye, wild at what had overtaken him through his own folly and bloodthirsty desire, had suddenly sprang into the crowd surrounding Lance, tore through the latter with uplifted bowie in his left hand to plunge to his heart—this calling for the warning cry—when a bullet from the quickly drawn pistol of his intended victim, striking him in the knee, dropped the would-be murderer to the floor.

What might have further occurred, had the ruffian been at all popular with those of his class present, would not be very hard to guess; a general scrimmage very likely would have followed.

As it was, nobody took up in his behalf against our hero, though giving him all the attention his case required, as far as they were able; and a few moments after his fall (the interest in our hero having flagged somewhat, though he was still the center of a cluster of men), the place was in full blast again—bars, gaming-tables and stage all going as though nothing had happened.

CHAPTER XI.

CHARLEY MAY'S STORY—OUR HERO PLEDGED.

LANCE left the place immediately with the young fellow he had protected, and who, later, would have risked his life for him—in fact, did risk it—and went to the hotel, the Inter-Ocean, where he was stopping, going immediately to his room.

On the way from the saloon he had learned that the name of his companion was Charley May, and that he was in trouble, and having become interested in him, he brought him to his room to learn his story.

"Now, Charley," said he, as both seated themselves, "tell me the whole story—all the particulars, and if I can help you, I will, rest assured."

"I know you will, and I know you can, if any body can," returned the young fellow, whose age was about that of our hero. "I am so glad that I have met you," he continued, "for I have heard men speak of you as the bravest of the brave."

"No matter about that, Charley," Lance broke in, laughing.

"Well, I know myself, now, that you are not afraid of these ruffians, that they are afraid of you, and that they can't shoot you. It was very strange, what I saw."

"Nothing strange, Charley, if you understand it," broke in Lance; "but tell me your story."

"I will," said the other, whose eyes had been fixed on the face of our hero all the time with a look of very great regard; "I can tell you all you wish to know in a few minutes: We lived in Denver, my father, sister and myself making all our family, mother having been dead three years."

"About three months ago, everybody seemed to be leaving Denver for the Black Hills, and father joined a small company which was to make the journey on horseback, taking along a couple of wagons."

"A few days later I determined to join the company, much against the wishes of my sister. Oh! how I wished to listen to her—who would be left alone, as far as relatives were concerned. To make the story short, I will say that the company started, my father and myself making two of the entire twelve, two of whom drove the wagons."

"We had not been on the road four hours when we were joined by another, mounted and armed like the rest of us, and that person was no other than my sister Mary!"

"She was dressed in man's clothes, and rode like a man, and neither father nor myself recognized her when she rode up; she had stained her face and cut her hair, and these men's clothes, you know."

"But she made herself known very soon, and said she was going with us—if the only two beings near and dear to her were going to the Black Hills, she was going!"

"She was chered by the rest of the party, and pronounced a girl of true grit—she is the spunkiest thing you ever saw—and they all said 'come on.'"

"What was there to do? she was was determined to go if we went; and how could we back out? We consulted, and the result was, Mary

continued with the party, which was more lively than otherwise it would have been.

"Everything went well enough until one night—it was very dark—when we went into camp about twenty-five miles from Laramie, where some soldiers were stationed, as we had heard."

"It was my father's watch the latter part of that night—I had been on until one o'clock, and about three o'clock Mary came out and pressed him to go in and sleep—I got this from him—which he did. I only know from being told what followed between that time and daylight—that all our horses had been run off, the mules being left, and that Mary was missing."

The young fellow broke down here, and wept hysterically, like a woman, our hero making no endeavor to check the burst of grief, thinking it best, probably, to let it have vent.

The violence of the young fellow's grief expended itself at length, when he exclaimed, in a tone most harrowing: "For God's sake, find my sister—find my sister! You can if anybody can!"

"That's saying a good deal," remarked our hero; and in a deeply sympathetic tone, added: "but I pledge you my word I will do all I can to find her. I have a sister myself, and I know I should feel as badly as you, under the circumstances. I sympathize with you greatly. Now tell me what were the conjectures of your father and yourself at her mysterious disappearance."

"We thought she might possibly have secured her horse and escaped; we thought so at first, but as we never could hear of her, we concluded she must have been carried off—run off on her horse and killed, possibly, afterward."

"No one heard her scream, and how could they have carried her off—they didn't know she was a woman, of course not, and what would they want to carry her off for?"

"Oh, dear! I don't know what to think. I only know she is gone—gone! Oh, if you can only find her, or know what her fate was, if she is no more!" Again the young fellow gave way to his feelings, and most passionately.

"I will do what I can, Charley, believe me," said our hero, at length, when the other became calmer; "and from to-night I devote myself to the purpose of learning of or finding your sister. I shall leave Cheyenne in the morning for Chugwater, where I shall meet one or more ex-road agents who will serve me—there are a number who will do so—and before I go to bed I will set some inquiries on foot."

The two kept up the conversation for half an hour, Lance getting a minute description of his companion's sister, learning all about the father's movements, etc.—etc., and telling the young fellow that he would hear from him from time to time—he or his father—at the hotel they were then in, and at the I. X. L., in Deadwood; receiving the heartfelt thanks of the sorrowing brother, and prayers for the safety and success in the mission he had undertaken.

The young men were shaking hands outside the hotel, arranging to meet in the morning, when our hero, a sudden thought seeming to strike him, asked the other:

"Is there any rejected lover in the background of this case, Charley? I ask because—"

"There is," broke in Charley; "but what can that have to do—oh, I see; it is possible, but not probable, for he was in Denver when we left. Mary would have nothing to say to him, though he persisted in forcing himself on her notice. He got acquainted with her about a year ago, and has been in Denver three or four times since; and only two days before we left, Mary told him if he did not keep away from her she would horse-whip him—and she would have done so, too."

"What was his name?" inquired Lance, somewhat expectantly.

"Smiggs—Samuel Smiggs—"

"Smiggs—Samuel Smiggs!" echoed our hero with vehement surprise. "I knew a fellow by that name," he said, in a quiet tone, and have two persons to hunt for now—the second that I may find or learn of the first. Don't ask me anything. Good-night. I will see you in the morning as agreed, before I start for Chugwater."

The two parted then, and Lance made his way back to the saloon where he had figured so remarkably a short time before.

CHAPTER XII.

AT CHUGWATER—THE INTERLOPER.

THE first important station on the road to the Hills, coming out of Cheyenne, is Chugwater.

The best hostelry there, at which all the "knowing ones" stop, is that kept by "Portuguese" Phillips, a famous scout under the celebrated Indian fighter, Gen. Harney, and who,

after the Fort Fetterman massacre, escaped from the garrison at Fort Phil Kearney, which was besieged by savages, and rode through miles of wilderness filled with the bloodthirsty red devils to Fort Laramie, the first to reach there with the horrible tidings of the massacre mentioned.

At this hostelry, on the following day, Sunday, in the altogether democratic reception-room, where travelers ate and drank, smoked and chatted in common, were seated a number of individuals—travelers, ranchmen, freighters, etc., including three or four of doubtful status in society, to say the least, among whom, sitting in a corner with a companion of youthful appearance, who might have been a cow-boy, or anything of that caliber, from his dress and stolid expression of countenance, the reader would have recognized Dave Plum, of Joe Brice's gang, who, with two others on the occasion of the stage attack, fled at the first fire, or upon the announcement of the presence of the "Lion" as one of the defenders of the stage and its treasure.

The day was drawing to a close, and Dave and his companion had "put in a square meal," judging from the looks of the table and Dave's satisfied air, and were just lighting cigars as we introduce the reader.

Evidently the two had been conversing, for Dave said in a low tone, and with a chuckle, after getting his segar well going:

"Yes, we seed ther hull on't—didn't git along ways orf, yer know—an' I larfed ter think what Joe would er said if he'd er knowd how I fixed his pistols, an' some o' the rest on 'em. That war kind er pizen work, that war, an' I moun't a done it, e'en 'f I did give ther job away, on'y Joe he back-capped me hefty 'bout a month ago, an' I swore I'd git square onto him; an' I kinder calkerlate he'll reform now, an' quit ther road. He kin play chuck-a-luck 'n' rooshynor, 'n' them games; but he ain't no good no more fur ter work ther road, he ain't."

The speaker ceased, chuckled heartily, and pulled away hard at his big segar, to recover the fire that had nearly died out during his drawling delivery. His companion said nothing, and from his looks, one would have doubted that he comprehended anything the other had said, so stolid was his look.

Dave had taken a few long pulls and strong pulls at his segar in silence, when a rough-looking customer, (the stranger on the plains might have set him down as a mule-driver, perhaps, but the "knowing one" would have "placed" him at once among the class known as "road agents") who had been eying him (Dave) for some moments from a chair, about fifteen feet distant, approached and leisurely drawing up a chair, sat down at the table-end, and looking Dave (on the left) straight in the eye, said, in the drawl peculiar to many of the "free-and-easy" gentlemen of the plains:

"Pard, I know ye, 'n' then agin I don't. 'Pears ter me I've seen ye afore. Can't say zactly whar, but som'ers—hain't I?"

"P'raps!" was the laconic rejoinder of Dave, he taking a very long pull at his weed, and puffing a cloud of smoke from his cavernous mouth.

"Who mout yer be, pard, axing yer parding?"

"Wal, I mought be Settin' Bull, 'n' then agin I moun't be, 'n' be hanged ter yer, not axin' yer parding!"

"I call yer, pard, with sixes," the interloper said, tapping the butt of a revolver significantly. "I'll see yer hand outside, 'n' not disturb Portuguese 'n' their congregation yer. We don't want no witness, do we, pard?"

"My nevey, yer, mout ez well see ther hands," said Dave, quietly, pointing with his thumb to the stolid-looking young fellow in his company, and hitching his chair about as he spoke. "Ef you lay over me, he ken carry ther news ter Mary Ann, so ter speak; savey?"

The interloper cast a single glance of ineffable contempt at Dave's companion, then got up from the table, Dave rising immediately after, the young fellow leaving his place mechanically, evincing not the least interest in the affair about to come off, the consequences of which might be very serious to one or the other of the two men, or both.

Carelessly out of the place sauntered the two, with no more care or concern, excitement or uneasiness, than as though they had been called out to look at a kicking mule, while the third looked as stupid as possible.

"I reckon we moun't need perceed no further," said Dave, after a walk of ten minutes at a moderate gait, over the plains to the westward.

"It mout be yer ez well ez any whar," returned the other, and halted. "I called yer 'n'

't's yer say, pard—steel or bullets, 'n' I don't care wich."

"Bullets," was the laconic reply.

"Bullets 'tis! Thar's ther sun; shall we toss fur ch'ice, or how? Ther terms is yourn; set 'em up."

"Face north 'n' south," said Dave; "fifteen paces or tharabouts. My 'nevey, yer, ter give ther word fur ther fust shot. Bobby, ye count one, two, three, an' then each man for hisself. Them's ther terms, stranger."

"Them's lib'ral, pard, 'n' I'm agreed. Step 'em out, or I'll do ther pacin'."

"How's this—six inches don't make no difference either way?" said Dave, who had opened about the distance he had named, and now faced the other.

"Jest ther button, pard," and the speaker and Dave stood face to face, ready at the word to open a murderous fire upon each other—and for what?

CHAPTER XIII.

THREE AGAINST A PAIR—THE DAKOTA TOMTIT.

"I'm ready," said Dave.

"Same yer," said the other.

"One, two—three!" drawled out the stolid young fellow—Dave's "nevey"—who had not manifested the slightest interest in the very serious affair about to transpire; on the contrary, exhibiting the utmost apathy and indifference up to that moment.

Crack—crack! went two revolvers.

Dave's left arm was bitten by a bullet.

The explosions brought a fire into the eye of the looker-on, and a firmness of stature that none would have thought possible, the change in the young fellow was so remarkable.

Crack—crack! again went the two weapons, a second pair of bullets speeding in opposite directions on deadly errands.

One ploughed a furrow in Dave's scalp, the other tearing open the left cheek of his antagonist.

The pistols had hardly been fired, when the patter and clatter of horses hoofs, and a wild, peculiar screech smote the ears of the combatants and looker-on.

Two horsemen had come out from "Portuguese" Phillips' place, and their steeds were tearing over the plain towards the duelists like the wind; the rider who had sent out his piercing yell, gesticulating and shouting to the shooters, an eighth of a mile in his front.

The approach of the horsemen interfered with the progress of the bloody duel for an instant only, the combatants merely giving them a glance, and settling to their sanguinary work again, but leveling their weapons simultaneously and firing—no; only the pistol of Dave responding to the touch of its owner, that of the other refusing to perform its office.

A sharp crack, a mocking snap and the stranger reeled, and with a groan fell to the earth, the weapon that had played him false being thrown far in the rear of where he had stood by a spasmodic action of the pistol arm, the hand being rendered nerveless.

The apathetic young fellow who had witnessed the tragedy, displaying now remarkable celerity of motion, was bending over the fallen man in an instant, while Dave walked leisurely to the spot, and with the utmost unconcern—he felt, probably, that the fight having been forced upon him he had no call to display any great concern in the matter.

Shot in the groin, the man had turned on his back, and as Dave came up he said, with a groan between every two or three words:

"Pard, I lay my hand down ter yourn. A pair warn't no good agin'—three, pard. Tell ther boys—that Car'liss—Car'liss Jack, of Wyomin', passed in his checks jest (ow!) back of Portygee P'llips place, an' ther verdict war nobody to blame but himself."

He paused, and his compatriot of the plans, Dave Plum, came to his knees by his side, the contortions of his face, as he endeavored to assume a solemn look, being something ludicrous to behold.

"Air you Careless Jack, o' Wyomin'?" he asked, huskily.

"I war him, but—"

"An' I'm ther mean cuss ter lay out ther man wich saved my brother Jim Plum. I'm Dave Plum. I seed yer a minit once."

"I knowed I knowed yer," broke in the wounded man, speaking with less effort than before, adding, as he held out his hand:

"Shake, pard; I war oncivil (ow! oh, easy, pard) an' mean; howsomever, I mout put yer in ther—way o' scoopin' in—some dust—don't

speak, pard. Mebbe so yer mout hev heard o' ther Dakota Tomtit—eh? Hev? Good. In course yer've heard o' ther Wonder—some calls him ther 'Lion'—wich he is a wizard (ow! that war a stinger) an' larfs at bullets. Good! I know'd ye'd heard o' him. Wall, ther Tomtit—he warnts him—ther 'Lion'—five thousand dollars wuth. Now, ef yer kin weezle him—savey?—ther 'Lion'—I heerd he war about this yer place frequent—up ter Tomtit's camp—wich it is in a canyun—"

"Yaw-he—yaw-he—yaw-he!"

A screech, or a series of screeches, once heard, never to be forgotten, at this instant interrupted the wounded bandit, (for such he was), causing him to utter in a tone of surprise the most unbounded:

"By the big horn spoon, that are ther song o' ther Tomtit—ther he ar."

Another, or rather a trill of three screeches, harsh and horrible, grated again upon the ear, and one of the two horsemen, after a mighty bound of his powerful steed, brought the latter to his haunches, his forefeet braced within three inches of the prostrate bandit's boots; the other horseman coming up a moment later.

The first was a man of herculean proportions—powerful, grand and graceful. His face was handsome, but while it spoke of indomitable courage, it also showed its possessor to be a man of fierce passions and imperious will, not to be thwarted with impunity; of suspiciousness and cruelty; handsome to look at, but not pleasing to study.

He was the "Dakota Tomtit."

It would have been more fitting to have styled him the Condor, but western humor had contradistinguished him, or his qualities rather.

One would have thought of a Centaur, looking at him astride his powerful and spirited steed, of which he seemed a part, and which he managed with so much ease and grace.

"How's this, Careless Jack?" he asked, in an off-hand way, as he reined in his steed.

"Dead squar, cap'n," replied the prostrate man, looking up at the other. "Dead squar—I called, and he held threes to my pair."

"Then it's your business and not mine. Where's your hurt?"

"In my grine, cap'n, an' on ther slant 'mong ther innards, I reckon. I'm called for all I'm worth, this time, cap'n, an' 'f Peter out —"

"Go back and get a wagon, Jake," broke in Tomtit, speaking to the other horseman, who instantly dashed off for Phillips'.

"Now, who are you, man?" asked the bandit chief of Dave, adding: "I'm the Dakota Tomtit."

"Yes; I heard yer sing. I'm Dave Plum."

"Take him in 'f he'll jine ther band, cap'n. He's dead Plum up 'n' down," interjected Careless Jack, smiling at his ghastly joke.

"Plum—Plum? Never heard of you."

"Others hev," quietly observed Dave.

"Careless, for instance," dryly said the Tomtit.

"Who are you?" he asked of Dave's companion.

"Mr.—he's my uncle," returned the latter, indicating Dave by a nod, his manner and look as stupid as at first.

"You're a nice huckleberry," said the Tomtit with a contemptuous laugh, and turned to Dave.

"Plum," said he, "did you ever see the boy that likes to be shot at—the boy that broke up Joe Brice's gang the other day, and laid out Joe himself? They call him the 'Lion,' the 'Wonder,' the 'Wizard,' the 'Terror,' and the devil knows what?"

"Yes, I've seen him," was Dave's reply.

"Well, I want that boy—that 'Wonder'—and the man who gets him into my camp will get five thousand dollars in dust! Jake knows him, and he thinks he can bring him; but I want a dozen on his trail—fifty, if I can get them—for a boy like him, who can't be shot or cut (they say Joe drove a long Spanish knife into him up to the hilt, and that the boy walked off with it sticking in him after laying Joe out) is too dangerous to be swinging around loose. Half the men on the road are quaking in their shoes for fear of meeting him. Give it out to all you know that I want him for five thousand dollars—the Tomtit does!"

Once or twice while the captain was speaking, the stupefied young fellow glanced at him with something of a lightning-like gleam in his eye; but the fire went out as suddenly as it was kindled.

"What 'u'd yer do with him, cap'n?" queried Dave, with much apparent interest. "He's worse nor a cat with nine lives—the 'Lion' is. Bullets won't bore him, steel won't slash him,

hemp won't hang him, fire won't burn him, 'n' water won't drown him!—I knows what I'm talkin' about, cap'n. What'n thunder'd yer do with him?"

"Maybe he'd starve—but that's my business, what I'd do with him! You get him to my camp—you or any other man—alive, remember, I want him alive—and I'll down with the dust—\$5,000 worth! Bring him alive, and—yaw—he—yaw—he—yaw—he!"

The bandit broke in upon himself with one of those rasping, ear-splitting, blood-curdling screeches, as if his satisfaction in anticipating the hour when the "Lion" would be in his camp, was too great to restrain; and the startled air wailed and sighed as the lacerating screech pierced its depths, while the stolid young man tumbled in a heap to the ground, as if what little vitality he seemed to possess had been suddenly extinguished.

"Them war ther most butifulest warblin' notes I ever heerd," said Dave, with mock admiration. "Ther mockin' bird ain't nowhere!"

"Them wur the Tomtit's notes uv joy," said the wounded man, in less pain than he had been, adding: "yer orter hear them notes o' his'n wich he sings when ther boot is on the other leg—Jerusalem! they'd make your toenails curl in, yer nut-crackers play castinets, an' yer hair git up a war dance!"

Half an hour later, and Careless Jack was disposed of in the hostelry of Portuguese Phillips, with a U. S. surgeon who happened to be there, attending him, and probing for the bullet, eventually finding it, and giving the wounded man encouragement.

Still later in the evening, when the Tomtit happened to be by himself in the "reception" room, the reader might have seen the stupid-looking man sidle up to the bandit, and, looking at him with lack-luster eyes, make an awkward bow and scrape of the foot.

"Ken I hev any o' that dust 'f I fetch him to yer? Mebbe I kin do it, mister," were his words.

"You!" thundered the Tomtit, with a glance at the awkward fellow that made him shudder.

"Yes—I know him—the 'Lion!'" said the fellow, falteringly. "He's up the road, 'n I ken git him—he'll go anywhars with me."

"You fetch him in, and you shall have the whole of the dust," said the bandit, mollified by the simplicity of the other, with whom he then condescended to enter into conversation, which lasted for some little time.

CHAPTER XIV.

LANCE AND DAVE ON THE ROAD—TRAPPED BY BANDITS.

THE next day Dave Plum and his simple companion left Portuguese Philip's, both finely mounted and armed, striking north on the road to the Hills.

"Did I lay it on too thick, yesterday, young 'un, 'bout bullets 'n knives 'n things?" queried Dave of his companion, when some distance on the road.

"Not a bit," said the other, laughing so heartily, and looking so unlike his previous self, though wearing the same dress, that the reader would have greatly wondered at the sudden change in his manner. "Not a bit," he repeated; "it is well to give it to them solid—a whole hatful at a time. The Tomtit more than half believes what you said, after what I so innocently told him last night. Everybody is more or less superstitious, and these fellows out here—well, there is really more truth than romance in what you said to the Tomtit, Dave."

"Don't I know it, young 'un? But air yer goin' right inter this devil's den?"

"I am going there, some day, Dave; you are safe enough, of course. I told him I would have to work in my own way to get the 'Lion' into his clutches, and—"

The young fellow, whom the reader now recognizes—the "Lion"—burst forth with laughter, interrupting his further speech.

"He air a terror, that Tomtit," said Dave, at length.

"He's red-hot!" responded Lance; "and how the sparks would fly from him, if he knew that the one he so badly wants (\$5,000) was giving him fool taffy last night. Ha—ha—ha! it makes me laugh to think of it. But isn't it strange that none of these Monks or Plugs know anything about the raid on that Denver party two weeks ago, or so? You are satisfied, from your talk with the Tomtit, that his gang had nothing to do with it, are you?"

"He's clean, thar," responded Dave. "I know

from the way he talked, and Car'liss too. 'Tain't them, young 'un."

"Well, I wish I knew whose gang it was. I am pledged to find that young fellow's sister; and I am determined to find that fellow Smiggs, if he is in the country, here, as I believe he is. We shall get a clew some day, I feel sure. I am interested and anxious now, Dave. I have something more to move me than the mere money from that stage company. I feel more like a knight-errant now. Come, let us move horses; I feel like riding, and riding sharp!"

From an easy canter, the two struck into a sharp gallop, which was kept up for some distance, when they slackened up.

That night Lance and his companion lay over at Laramie, taking the road again before day-break the next morning.

Reaching Rawhide Springs about sunrise, they found near by a camping party in commotion; and stopping, learned that six valuable horses and several mules had been run off by "road agents" during the night.

Three of the party were about to start in pursuit of the thieves, and Lance offered his services, Dave, of course, doing the same.

As both were well-armed, carrying rifles as well as pistols, and splendidly mounted, the offer was gladly accepted, when the five rode out of camp, Lance and Dave leading, the trail of the robbers being plainly visible.

Thirty miles over a rough country the pursuers followed the trail, which grew fresher with every mile made.

After a short breathing spell at the foot of a hill, the ascent was commenced—a Mr. Woollen, of Denver—the chief man of the party journeying to the Hills, being three or four rods ahead of Lance and the others; he thinking that, if any of the robbers were met with, he, being in advance, could prevail upon them to return his stock without bloodshed, they seeing that he had a well-armed party at his back.

The hill was half achieved by the gentleman named, when up from behind a huge rock on his right sprang a man with a rifle, which he leveled at the advancing horseman, ordering him to halt.

The latter halted, as did the rest of the party, and throwing up his arms, said his party purposed no harm, but he wanted his horses.

"If that's all, thar they ar," said the robber; and pointing to a large herd of stock across a ravine, added: "Go 'n' git 'em 'n' be off!"

The gentleman started down the slope, after beckoning to those behind, who immediately moved on after him.

"I think it is a trap," said Lance to Dave, as he started up; "but I reckon we can take care of ourselves against the thieves. If it happens to be the Tomtit gang, I have the password."

"So have I," said Dave, "an' forgot all about it."

Starting down the slope of the ravine, the party proceeded a short distance, when, at a cry from the robber in the rear, up started eight men from behind as many boulders, each with a rifle at his shoulder; three of which were lowered, however, five being sufficient to cover the advancing party.

"Trapped! I told you so, Dave," said Lance, instantly the first head appeared; "and we must wait the action of the others, who may not be disposed to fight."

"Halt, thar!" commanded one of the banditti. "Dismount 'n' lay down yer shootin' irons, 'n' squeal on them rocks, thar—down!"

At the peremptory command of the bandit, Mr. Woollen and his two companions, who were abreast, Lance and Dave a little in the rear, at once dismounted, released their horses, and threw down their arms, obeying the robbers' mandate to the very letter by seating themselves on contiguous rocks.

"Down thar—you two!" cried out the robber who had ordered the halt, to our hero and his companion; "down, er we'll drop you!" and the two were instantly covered by four rifles.

Gallaing as it was to Lance and Dave to surrender without firing a shot, the former decided to do so, and trust to the chapter of accidents, rather than bring death to the other three; very certain to follow if one of the robbers was shot.

"Lay down your tools," said the spokesman of the gang, meaning the weapons of Lance and Dave, as the two dismounted. "Thar, now set down on them rocks 'n' keep cool."

Depositing their arms on the ground, Lance retaining a revolver which he had placed in an inside breast pocket of his coat, the two seated themselves as directed.

Three of the robbers then stepped up, two covering them with revolvers, the third saying: "Come, unload now, an' don't be backward

about comin' forward with your boodle an' jim-cracks!"

Lance instantly, on the demand of the robber, pounded in a low tone the following seeming singular query:

"Who is lord of the hills?"

The effect of this was the immediate lowering of two revolvers, one of which covered him, the other, Dave, while the expression on the face of the robbers changed at once.

"Answer, if you know," was the robbers' response, in an undertone.

"The Tomtit is lord of the hills!" spoke up our hero, coming to his feet as he spoke.

His words were instantly repeated by the three robbers, in a low tone, the spokesman of the three asking Lance if the others were "solid on the word," to which he was constrained to reply in the negative.

"All right," said the robber; "pick up yer tools and skip or stay, as yer like—you two." The speaker then left.

Upon an old blanket spread upon the ground, the three Denver men, with pistols leveled at their heads, were forced to deposit their money and valuables, and, circumstanced as they were, ready obedience was the only safe alternative.

The victims were not only forced to give up their money and valuables, but their clothes, which were substantial and good, the robbers exchanging with them.

"Look at that scoundrel of a greaser trying to get into those trousers," said Lance; "I would like to put a bullet into one of his legs."

"I'd like ter plug him in the head," said Dave, not so conservative in the matter of shooting as Lance, who shot only to disable, except in the case of Indians.

At this instant the greaser, balanced on his left leg, he having inserted that member into the trousers, was in the act of encasing his right leg when he lost his balance and tumbled to the ground, his ridiculous mishap provoking loud guffaws from the rest of the gang.

"Hark!" ejaculated Lance, springing to his feet just as the greaser went to earth, and looking up the acclivity.

CHAPTER XV.

SURPRISED BY SIOUX—LANCE AND DAVE.

THE ribald laughter of the rascally gang was suddenly cut short by a chorus of unearthly yells, intermingled with five or six rifle or pistol shots, the brow of the hill being instantly crested with a score or more of mounted Sioux, all horribly daubed with war-paint.

Pausing for an instant to take in the situation, after the first comers had fired, the painted devils dashed down the slope, uttering the most demoniacal yells.

Lance and Dave sprang for their arms at the first sight of the bedaubed fiends, and a moment later were astride of their horses. The robbers left their victims, who rushed to regain their arms to defend themselves now against the painted devils of the hills and plains, and each secured his rifle.

Thundering down the slope, yelling and firing, came the savages on their wiry ponies, while the robbers ran for the shelter of boulders, the three Denver men—one grabbing up the blanket containing his property—doing likewise, while Lance and his companion, at the former's suggestion, dashed along the side of the slope at a slashing pace, and flanking the savages on the right swept up the acclivity while the latter ran plunging down.

So sudden and quick had been this movement, and so fleet were their good steeds, Lance's being a thoroughbred Kentucky runner, the other a fine animal of extraordinary speed, that with the advantage they had gained, they could easily have bidden the savage Sioux good-by, laughing to scorn the ponies of the fiends, even had the latter turned upon them.

But they were not thinking of escape, at least our hero was not.

"Now, Dave," said the latter, wheeling his horse on the brow of the acclivity, his companion following his example, "pick your devil on the right, I'll strike mine on the left."

Up to his shoulder went his trusty "Henry," carrying eighteen shots, a puff of smoke and a ringing crack instantly following, Dave's rifle being discharged a moment later.

"You dropped your devil, but I killed mine," said Dave, as an Indian on the left of the band threw up his arms and tumbled to the ground.

At this moment a savage flung himself from his pony near by a big boulder, whereupon Dave exclaimed:

"One o' the boys is gone or one o' them Denver chaps. The red cuss is goin' ter scalp him!"

In a moment the Indian was lost to sight behind the boulder.

"Draw on him, Dave, the instant he shows up," said Lance, his rifle ready for his aim.

"Yours truly," said Dave, facetiously. "Halloo!" he the next instant exclaimed, "there comes six o' the sky-pink devils up the hill, to see what we're made on, I reckon, and git our scalps if they ken. Thar's ther cuss on ter the rock thar."

Out came the dismounted savage from behind the boulder, and crack—crack went the rifles of Lance and Dave, the painted demon, with a warm and bleeding scalp at his belt, falling in his track as he made for his pony.

In the meantime the six savages who had left the main body, which now consisted of twelve, were riding up the hill widely deployed, three hundred yards, at least, being the distance between the riders on the right and left respectively; riding, too, as fast as their ponies would carry them, and with bodies as little exposed as possible.

"Shoot a pony, Dave," said Lance, "if you can't shoot one of the red devils. Here goes for that third one on the right."

Both fired, and one of the ponies crippled right to the earth, shot, probably, in the shoulder, while a second reared and fell over backwards, with no harm to its rider.

"Come," said Lance to Dave, "we had better separate for a time. You keep to the south, and I'll to the north, and divide this party of red devils. Only for those Denver men I would let the gang down there fight it out with the painted demons."

With these words, our hero and his companion dashed off, not in opposite directions, but their two courses from the start forming the letter V; and up from the side of the ravine came the four mounted Sioux, yelling like demons from the pit.

CHAPTER XVI.

DEATH IN THE DEFILE—THE SIOUX SURPRISED IN TURN.

INTO the ravine or defile we will now take the reader.

Examination reveals that every one of nine or ten boulders has a sort of casemate attached, formed of smaller rocks, in which a man can sit, and from which, through a loophole, he can fire at any one approaching his own retreat, or that of some other, each casemate commanding the approach to one or two, and in some instances three and even four others.

The attack of the savages had been a complete surprise, and two of the robbers lay dead on the ground, one just at the entrance of a casemate, and the other, the greaser before mentioned, a few feet from the spot where he had tumbled when trying to don the trousers, the mishap costing him his life.

Both were scalped, and behind a boulder having no protecting casemate, lay the body of one of the Denver men, a bullet hole in the forehead, and the scalp taken.

In addition to the bodies of the two white men and that of the greaser, there were lying about the boulders seven slain savages, some of them with their demoniac faces, (disgustingly daubed), turned to the blue Heavens above, and others face downward.

Most of the redskins remained on their ponies, the exceptions thinking, doubtless, that they could best further their devilish designs on foot; but whenever the cowardly wretches exposed any portion of their bodies as they skulked about the boulders, the crash of a rifle and the whistle of a bullet reminded them of the risk they ran; and the remainder was heeded at once.

Suddenly they were startled by the wildest yell that ever broke from throat of human or of brute; a yell that would have shamed the shriek of the most savage Sioux in the moment of fiercest and wildest onslaught.

"Yaw-he!—yaw-he!—yaw-he!"

It was the shriek of the Tomtit in his wildest flight of rage and ferocity, and was the emphasis which he put upon the firing of four rifles—he and the member of his band who was in his company at Chugwater, our hero and Dave Plum being the firing party.

It was the last sound heard on earth by two of the savages, who dropped lifeless ere the yell had reached its highest key, a third falling with a bullet in his hip.

Like cats, the dismounted savages sprang for their ponies and mounted, then dashed away down the defile. Of twenty-three that made the

onslaught, only nine rode away from the spot where they had fancied triumph awaited them.

But the Fates rode in their rear, and on faster steeds—Lance and the Tomtit, Dave Plum and the other, while not far behind these, rode three of the six remaining robbers on the horses of the Denver men, one other of the gang seizing an Indian pony, thus leaving two robbers to guard the captives.

It was a race for life with the redskins and cut-throats; and every now and then the Tomtit, as he dashed on, muttered his wild and startling yell; but with never a shriek, the silent savages swung down the ravine at the best speed their trusty little ponies were capable of achieving; but with a good third of a mile between them and their pursuers when fairly under way after the start, there was now not more than a quarter of a mile between pursuers and pursued, with our hero four lengths of his steed in advance of the former.

The sides of the defile had flattened away gradually as the rough riders ranged rapidly through the bottom; and now could be seen a broad plateau of gently rising ground ahead.

A moment, and this is reached by two of the Sioux; the next, and the entire band of savages reach it and scatter like so many sparks from an exploding rocket.

Striking the open, grassy ground, the chief dashed straight away, swerving neither to the right nor left, while the others struck off at all points of a semicircle.

Half a minute later, and the hoofs of our hero's horse thundered on the grass-grown ground, and right on the trail of the Indian chief was the bounding steed kept by his fearless rider; the Tomtit and his gang each singling out a savage and riding for him.

On dashed the chief and our hero, the latter's fleet and powerful thoroughbred gaining at every bound on the former's pony, which, nevertheless, seemed to speed over the ground like a bullet.

On, until the span between the two would measure no more than six hundred yards. On, until the savage hears the pat—pat, thud—thud, of the powerful thoroughbred's hoofs, when he reins in, whirls on the back of his pony, raises his rifle and fires at his pursuer; dashing on immediately after.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE CHASE OF THE CHIEF—DEATH OF SWEET WATER.

NOT a wild shot was his, for Lance heard the whizz of the bullet as the latter cut the air over his head. But it was a miss, and a mile would have been no more.

"The red rascal shoots well," soliloquized Lance, and gave his thoroughbred the spurs, the noble steed sweeping on like a whirlwind.

The unearthly screech of the Tomtit then reached our hero's ears from far on his left and rear. Turning, he saw a riderless pony dashing away, and knew that the robber chief had "nailed his man."

Thoroughly aroused, full of excitement, Lance urged on his rapidly flying steed, after sweeping his eyes around the "open," counting six savages and seven whites, all in rapid motion; and to the extent of his powers, the thoroughbred responded.

Right in the rear of the savage chief our hero rides, and less than four hundred yards now separate the two.

Suddenly "Turk" is reined in and wheeled to the right—ha! strange, the savage at the same moment whirls his pony to the left, and at one and the same instant, both rifles are discharged.

W-h-i-z sings the red devil's bullet as it speeds past our hero's head, not six inches from it, probably, and off dashes the savage unharmed by the bullet from Lance's rifle.

Ha! look! The chief falls forward on his pony's neck.

The pony slackened its speed—stops.

The thoroughbred thunders on, but in an oblique direction to the left.

Evidently its rider is not altogether satisfied concerning the performance of the savage.

"Can the red cutthroat be feigning death, and taking the chances of my coming up without firing again?" queried our hero, aloud. "Down, Turk—way down," was the command to his steed, which stopped as if it were paralyzed.

Lance raised his rifle to his shoulder, and drew a bead on the savage, who made no movement.

"If he is dead, another bullet won't hurt him," he said; "and if he is shamming, he should have one by all means," saying which he fired.

A moment, and the pony turned so as to ex-

pose the right sides of itself and rider to the eyes of Lance, who could see the dexter arm of the savage hanging down, the hand grasping his rifle, the muzzle of which appeared to touch the ground.

"Shake out, Turk," said our hero to his steed; and in less than half a minute (the Tomtit almost upon him), he reached the spot where the Indian chief, dead or alive, clung to the neck of his pony, the animal constantly turning about.

A single glance disclosed that the savage had departed in spirit for the "happy hunting grounds," and would no more act his atrocious part on earth.

His left arm was clasped about the neck of his pony, on the right side of which hung his head, the blood oozing from a hole in the forehead where a bullet had burst forth, having entered just behind the left ear.

Our hero dismounted and secured the tomahawk, scalping-knife and pipe of the dead chief, and was exploring a pocket in his beaded belt (wampum), when up rode the robber chief.

"The old boy died in the saddle, didn't he?" was the latter's first utterance, after a glance at the dead Indian. Noticing the weapons which Lance had secured, and seeing the rifle of the chief, he asked the former if he wanted it; receiving a reply in the negative, he wrested the weapon from the death-grip of the savage, making the third he had secured.

From the pocket in the wampum belt of the chief, Lance fished out a dirty envelope which he found to contain an official document dated at Laramie, three months previous, and signed by General Miles, to the effect that the bearer (Sweet Water,) a chief of the Brules Sioux, was a loyal, good Indian, etc.

Showing the document to the Tomtit, he remarked that he would show it to the general and let him know that his "good Indian" had proven a backslider and come to grief.

Lance mounting his horse then, for the second time since he started or the race after the chief, took a look over the broad plateau.

A number of riderless steeds he saw scattered here and there, and several bodies lying on the ground.

Away off to the left he saw three horsemen in rapid motion, and away to the right, four. Then he learned from the robber chief that all but two of the savages were slain.

"One of these devils—the one off to the right, there—killed one of my boys," said the Tomtit, as the two rode along back towards the ravine, "and I'm afraid he will get away, and the other one, too. But it was a pretty bad scald on old Sweet Water, here, to lose himself and nineteen of his pals, even if these two devils get away. He woke up the wrong party this time, and got the grand goose. The boys and I 'owe you one,' young fellow, you and your friend Plum, for your assistance in this scrimmage."

Let us say here, that shortly after the pursuit of Lance and Dave by the four savages commenced, the Tomtit and his man appeared on the scene, and that only one of the redskins got away with his life, he succeeding in getting to cover in a piece of timber.

"I shall hold you bound to pay the debt, since you acknowledge it," said Lance, who instantly settled in his mind that the debt should be canceled by the return of their property to the Denver man, and their safe deliverance from the hands of the robber.

"The Tomtit will square his obligations to you," said the robber chief, somewhat haughtily; "but don't you forget that you are under a promise to me—you are to bring the 'Lion' to me, remember!" Then, looking sharply at our hero, he said: "You don't look quite so sleepy and stupid as you did last Sunday at Chugwater. I wouldn't have supposed then that you had the pluck you have shown to-day, young fellow."

"Indians wake me up," said Lance, laughing, and the two rode rapidly on for some moments in silence.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AT THE RENDEZVOUS—LANCE AND THE TOMTIT.

FIFTEEN minutes later, and Lance and the Tomtit arrived at the robbers' rendezvous in the ravine, the rest of the band being still out.

There the chief first learned of the capture of the Denver men, and Lance of the death of one of them.

The remaining two had come out from the protection of the boulders, on the flight of the Indians, and, being in possession of their rifles, and only two robbers about, they had maintained with these a sort of armed neutrality, one pair watching the other intently until the arrival of our hero and the chief of the robbers.

With the captured men, Lance entered into conversation, telling them who he was, and how the chase after the savages resulted.

"He says he owes me one," whispered Lance, in conclusion, referring to the Tomtit, "and I propose that he shall offset it by letting you go with your property; if he refuses, and you chose to resist, you may count on me to fight for you. It is three to three now—an even thing—and if you decide to resist the robbers, it had better be now—"

"No—no," said one of the two (Mr. Woolen), "we will not risk our lives and yours for what property there is at stake; but if you will try and save poor Rice's money there (the speaker pointed over to the dead body of their companion), we will send it to his family, for they need it. As for us, they may take what we have, if they will let us go after burying poor Rice."

"I will do all I can," said Lance, "but I have no great faith in this fellow—the head of the gang. Maybe, however, I can shame him into some little decency; I will—"

"Throw down those rifles, you two men," was the interrupting and imperious command of the robber chief, which was at once obeyed.

Lance arose immediately from a rock on which he had been sitting, all three having been seated during their conversation, and approached the trio of robbers.

"You owe me one," said he to the Tomtit, in an off-handed way.

The latter stared at him with a look of mingled surprise and inquiry, a slight shade of disdain also being discernable.

But this stare met such a wondrous, indescribable light flashing from the eyes of our hero, that it gave way in a moment to a rapid twinkling, the eyes of the robber becoming watery, and evading the fixed glance of the other, which then sought the eyes of the other two robbers, to conquer them in an instant.

"You said you owed me one," our hero continued, turning his strong, indescribable gaze again upon the chief, whose eyes failed to meet it; "and I took you at your word. Surely you will pay."

"I don't pay too much, young fellow," said the robber, in a tone that argued no very great generosity on his part. "But let me know what will square the debt, young fellow."

"Let those two men go with what they came here with, and keep the stock which you run off from their camp," was the bold demand of Lance.

The robber attempted to glare upon our hero, but his eyes were as powerless to withstand the gaze of the latter as powder to resist fire.

Glancing skywards, he said:

"I'll let the two men go with their lives, on your account, and square the debt I owe you."

"Bah!" ejaculated the dauntless Lance; "that squares nothing—you would let them go anyhow! You owe me one. Are you going to pay?"

"Not what you demand, young insolent," was the reply, in a sharp tone.

"Better for you, then, had you never acknowledged the debt," said our hero, and his full, large brown eyes shot such a flame at the robber that we believe he must have felt it, for his own eyes twitched and twinkled, and turned away from the face of Lance.

"What, you beardless boy!" ejaculated the robber. "Do you threaten me—the lord of the hills?" and his hand instinctively sought the butt of a revolver. He did not draw, however, but most abruptly asked: "Who are you, anyhow?"

"A beardless boy," replied Lance, with emphasis; "and if you want my name, it is Lance Dane!"

"Then, by the thunder of Heaven, you are the 'Lion!'" roared the robber. "Black Sam, your cousin from the east, gave me the name yesterday. Yaw-he—yaw-he—yaw-he!" and the bloodcurdling yell of the Tomtit so rent the silent surrounding, that they shrieked in return, as fiends in agony might shriek.

CHAPTER XIX.

LANCE SUBDUES THE TOMTIT—THE TOMTIT HIMSELF AGAIN.

OUR hero stood quietly by the Tomtit while the latter gave utterance to his rasping, frightful yell, which was expressive of exultation if anything; and his thoughts were of Black Sam, the name spoken by the robber, whom he knew to be Sam Smiggs, from what the Tomtit had said, and in the hills.

The eyes of the chief's two men were turned upon Lance with a glassy sort of a stare, while

their faces showed looks of wonder and something like awe.

They stood as motionless as statues, too; and somewhat surprising to say, so did the chief.

We say surprising, for one would have expected from him some pretty lively, if not grotesque manifestations, physically, of the satisfaction which his yell denoted that he felt at having the "Lion" in his power; but nothing of the kind took place. He stood, after this horrible yell, like one rooted to the spot, while his eyes began to assume, as they looked upon our hero, the same glassy stare that marked those of his two men.

Upon the chief, after he had seemingly transfixed his two men, Lance turned the full power of his wondrous gaze, and the gleam of his most brilliant eyes, whose color none could have told at the moment, was most intense and peculiar; and he seems to be conscious that the power of his glare was all-potent and irresistible, and that he was master of the situation.

For a few moments after that wild yell of the Tomtit's, there was silence, which was broken at length by our hero, who still kept the battery of his gaze directed upon the robber chief.

"I am the one you name," said he to the latter; "and now for a settlement of the debt you owe me. The terms I propose you must accept, or harder ones. Which?"

"I accept," said the robber, in the mildest manner imaginable, the reply not seeming in the least to surprise our hero, who beckoned to the two Denver men to approach.

"You can go in safety," said the chief, "with your stock and other property; and you can thank this young fellow for it. I owed him a debt, and pay it by liberating you."

The two men looked at the robber chief with something like astonishment, and at our hero with deepest gratitude, unmistakably expressed.

"Your men here can help bury the dead comrade of these men," said Lance to the Tomtit, who stood, the "mildest-mannered man that ever cut a throat," or robbed upon the highway.

"Yes; go, Bill, you and Cole," he said to his men, who did not budge, however, until Lance waved his hand in the direction of the dead body, when they moved off like two automata after the Denver man.

Our hero started for the spot, the chief following him like a menial in wake of his master.

A moment later and Dave Plum and two of the robbers rode up, driving before them a half dozen Indian ponies, while some little distance in the rear rode two others of the gang, one leading a pony which bore the dead body of the robber killed by the Indians.

One of these two, as well as one of the two with Dave, had been wounded during the chase after the savages; and the oaths of the two wounded ones as they dismounted, were not a few, nor of the mildest character.

The robbers who were to help bury the dead man of the Denver party produced two spades from one of the casemates, and in a very short time had a grave dug, when two of the others took the implements and proceeded to dig a second, accomplishing the task in a very short time.

Mr. Woolen recited a portion of the service of the Episcopal Church at funerals, and the two bodies were consigned to the earth.

The rough rascals were more or less impressed at the moment, but the service over and the body of their comrade out of sight, and they were themselves again.

"Now for a divvy of this boodle," said one of them shortly, and then came out with the query, "whar's that blanket?"

Our hero, who was talking to Dave, glanced at the chief, as much as to say: "Quiet that fellow, the speaker."

"There'll be no divvy," said the chief; "these men are to go free, with everything they brought here, and the stock from their camp."

"What?" ejaculated the astonished robber. "What! does ther Tomtit say this?"

"He does," was the response.

"Wal, I'll be d—d if I stan ter that say, no-how. I don't be if my name's Hank Brand, an' I know 'tis!" and the ruffian drew a revolver and cocked it. "Boys, are yer goin' ter stan' this?" he appealed to the other.

"Drop that pistol!" roared the robber chief, who had pulled, and now stood with a revolver leveled at the head of the refractory ruffian, and looking again like the Tomtit.

The fellow hesitated, and the chief fired, when down went the former shot, in the head, but firing harmlessly, the instant before he received the fatal shot.

"By the thunder of Heaven!" exclaimed the Tomtit, "no one of my band disputes my auth-

ority and lives to tell of it. These men go free with all their property, and know that I say so!" Turning then to our hero, he said, "I gave you my word when under some devilish spell, and I keep it; who shouldn't? but mind you, though these men go, you stay! I said nothing about your going, ha—ha—ha! I have you here, and will keep you. I know myself, now; I didn't a while ago. The Tomtit is himself again. Yaw-he—yaw-he—yaw-he!"

The three screeches of the robber chief were positively fiendish in the ferocity of their utterance, while his face looked the satisfaction that a fiend might wear in a moment of triumph.

The robbers who had shortly before ridden up with Dave, not having been informed in regard to the situation by the two who knew it, looked puzzled, and glancing from their chief to our hero, and from the latter to the former again, as if for explanation, while Dave, who had learned from Lance how matters stood, looked all alive and eager for the fray, if there was to be one, his right hand being closed on the butt of a revolver.

As for Lance, he stood proudly erect, and if not defiant, utterly fearless was his look, while the flash of his eyes was lightning.

When the Tomtit had uttered his terrible screech, he said to his band generally, in a savage way:

"Get the stock that belongs to these men, and everyone of you deliver up whatever you have taken from them—I mean everything, clothes and all!" He then turned towards our hero, and with a sardonic smile on his lips, said:

"You see the Tomtit can keep his word, young fellow. He can afford to keep it now, as the plunder of these men would not amount to the sum he would have given for your body, which is his now by the fortunes of war and not by contract. You have put your foot in it, my bold 'Lion;' breaking in upon himself here, he said to his gang: 'men, this is the 'Lion,' the 'Wonder,' the 'Wizard,' the 'Terror,' and the devil knows what. Take a good look at him, and take the best care of him till we get him to camp in the canon.'"

Lance, with the butt of his trusty rifle resting on the toe of his right boot, looked at the robber chief, while the latter was speaking, with the mildest of eyes lighted to just such a degree as to show that in their depths lived a fire that could be called forth to scathe when occasion required.

With a light laugh as the Tomtit ceased speaking, which expressed nothing if not contempt for the speaker, our hero said in a quiet but sarcastic way:

"I am glad that circumstances permit the lord of the hills to keep his word, and make money by so doing. Through the hills and over the plains wherever I go, I will spread his fame as one who keeps his word."

"You'll spread nothing, boy!" thundered the robber. "In an hour you will be in the canon, and will have seen all of the hills and plains you will ever see. Yaw-he—yaw-he—yaw-he!"

That screech of the Tomtit was one of triumph and exultation; and when he had given it vent, he roughly addressed his men, who still stood staring at our hero, looking him over from head to foot.

"Come, what are you gaping at. Let these two men off out of the way, and get ready to move for the camp."

The men set about obeying his commands, while he stepped up to the spot where lay the dead body of the man he had shot.

"Fool!" he exclaimed, as he moved the dead body with his foot, and satisfied himself that it was lifeless. "Fool!" he repeated, and then called two of his men and ordered them to put the body under ground.

"I mout er shot him a dozen times," growled Dave, in a low tone to Lance, both now standing together; the speaker meaning, of course, the bandit.

"I don't want him shot yet," said Lance; "he is of use to me. He knows Black Sam, whose whereabouts I must learn from him."

"What's the durned fool think he's goin' ter do with you, anyhow?" queried Dave, in Spanish, so guttural as to be hardly understood.

"I am curious to know, myself," returned Lance. "We shall soon learn, however. I will see these Denver men, now; they will be ready to be off shortly."

CHAPTER XX.

THE TOMTIT RAGES—THE ROBBERS WARNED.

TWENTY minutes later, and the two Denver men, with all their stock and property, includ-

ing clothing, with the exception of the trousers appropriated by the dead Greaser, left the robbers' retreat with mingled feelings of grief, anxiety, and satisfaction—grief for the loss of their companion, anxiety for, and on account of our hero, to whom they were so much indebted, and satisfaction that their lives and property were spared.

"I will join you before you reach your camp," said our hero, confidently, and bade the two adieu for the time being; and whether intentionally or not, he spoke loud enough to be overheard by the robber chief.

"Yes, you will," the latter roared out; "they go one way and you go the opposite. Better send word to your friends that you retire from active business from date, to seclude yourself in a canon, as the permanent guest of the Dakota Tomtit. The 'Lion' proposes, but the 'Lord of the Hills' disposes, in this instance."

"That remains to be seen, most high and mighty 'Lord of the Hills,'" said Lance, stepping up to within six feet of the robber chief. Continuing, he said: "Don't let us misunderstand one another, and one of us get disappointed. As you appear to have—or think you have—things all your own way, you can afford to listen to me a little. You mentioned a 'Black Sam' a short time ago, who told you he was a cousin of mine. He is *not*, but I am anxious to meet with him. I judge he is of your fraternity—where is his lair?"

"Up in a cave—no matter where," returned the robber, in his ordinary tone. "But you shall see him, if you are anxious—I will send him word when we get to the canon. He would like to meet you, I know."

"The sooner the better," said Lance; "but I must see him before I visit your canon. I have business of importance with him."

"Now," ejaculated the robber chief, in thunder tones, which he followed up with his wild, peculiar yell, expressive of triumph, as was his previous one.

This ejaculation was a signal, the reason for which we must explain.

The chief's six men, during the conversation here given, had disposed themselves in a circle about our hero, about four feet apart, doing so in a careless kind of a way, and with the idea, seemingly, that they were unnoticed.

But the keen, quick eye of our hero had noticed the movement, and had caught the eye of every man, who, as certain as light follows darkness and darkness light, felt that he was under the influence of some strange, unaccountable power.

Dave, too, had noticed this arrangement, and a movement of his, which was to place himself back to back with Lance, accompanied with the remark:

"No, yer don't," lost in the thunder of the robber's tone—this movement it was that precipitated the signal cry of "Now!" when the robbers were to rush in and secure the person of our hero.

Not a man moved, however, every one standing like a statue.

"Why don't yer come on?" cried Dave, with the utmost sarcasm in his tone, as he took the position mentioned, with a revolver in either hand, leveled at a robber. "Yer a lot o' sneaks."

"By the thunder of Heaven!" roared the robber chief, interrupting Dave, pulling forth a revolver as he gave utterance to the exclamation; "by the thunder of Heaven, why don't you obey? Curs and cowards—seize him!" and the enraged robber, foaming at the mouth, almost literally so, fired—at whom it would have been hard to tell.

He hit no one, however, nor did one of his men move an inch; all standing with their eyes fixed upon the Lion with a glassy stare, such as two of them had previously exhibited.

As the chief fired, his eyes, which fiercely flamed with the fire of furious rage, were caught by those of Lance, no mild eyes now, but blazing with a fire so strange and terrible as to consume the flame in the orbs of the robber chief, and cause them to shrink and retreat into their sockets as it seemed.

Turning about, utterly regardless of the chief, our hero's eyes burning with that strange fire of mysterious power, went quickly around the circle from one to another of the six subordinates of the Tomtit, and then rested upon the latter again, who, repeating his favorite oath when excited, and supplementing this with one of more dreadful import in a voice husky with passion, and face black with deadly purpose, fired point black at Lance?

All unharmed stood our hero, his rifle now grasped with his left hand near the muzzle, his

right on the butt of a revolver in his belt, while Dave, who now stood beside him, facing the robber chief, with a pistol in either hand, uttered low growls at being restrained by Lance from firing.

The astonishment of the robber at finding his shot had not taken effect, was only exceeded by his great rage at that, and from the attitude of his men, who stood like dummies around; and his eyes watered and seemed to suffer from the strange fire flashed into them from our hero's flaming orbs, from which, seemingly, he could not withdraw his gaze.

"By the thunder of Heaven!" he exclaimed with roaring passion; "what devilish power do you possess? Are you man or devil?"

"Only a beardless boy," returned Lance, calmly. "As to my power, it is not devilish; but what it is will avail you nothing to know; you cannot resist it, I am certain."

"By Heaven above and hell below," ejaculated the robber chief in a voice choked with rage, "I can and will resist your power. If you are not angel or devil—die!"

Raising his pistol, his eyes twitching and twinkling as though from meeting too intense a light, the raging robber fired three shots in rapid succession at the undaunted Lance. But his aim was false—he might as well have fired at a phantom and expected to draw blood.

Simultaneously with his third shot, which exhausted his revolver, Lance, with a motion so quick that it could hardly have been seen, pulled and fired, and the robber with a fiendish cry leaped into the air with the lobe of his left ear perforated.

"Hi, thar, hi!" was at this instant cried out in a loud voice from the south side acclivity, two horsemen appearing on the brow thereof.

"Thar's Bill Blood 'n' Larfin Luke," said Dave to Lance, who stood with his back to the newcomers, and who did not for a moment take his eyes from the robber chief, who, for some reason or other, did not avert his own. Jumping from the ground a raging tiger, the Tomtit had come down a whipped spaniel.

The cry that had been uttered by one of the horsemen had a note of warning in it, and a moment later the two men were on the ground.

"Say, Ben, thar'll be ther devil ter pay in this yer hollow in less'n half'n hour 'f yer don't git up 'n git," said one of the horsemen (Laughing Luke), addressing the Tomtit. "Van Fleet is puttin' fur this yer place with a company of the Third Cav'lry, hot foot. What'n thunder's the matter of yer, Ben?"

To this query the robber chief paid no heed, but stood looking at our hero as though held by the power of a basilisk, but now with a look on his face of entreaty, instead of rage.

Instantly, the fire in our hero's eyes was subdued to a lambent flame, when he replaced his pistol, and waved his hand once or twice before the face of the chief, when the latter, with a start, was freed from the power that held him despite his will.

Turning, Lance waved his hand at each of the six men of the gang, everyone starting as he did so, as if from a dream, and rubbing his eyes.

"Snakes 'n' sarpints!" exclaimed Laughing Luke, "if thar ain't ther 'Lion!'"

"By the big horn spoon, it ar'," was the exclamation quickly following from Bill Blood, who rode up in front of our hero, and both these rough riders and "tough" men, to say the least, if not outlaws, held out their hands to the "beardless boy," thus tacitly acknowledging one whose power, quietly exercised, was superior to their own unbridled violence.

And the Tomtit, too, presented his hand, saying:

"I cotton to you, young fellow, who wouldn't to another on the face of the earth. I believe all I have heard of you now. You bored my ear, when you could have bored my brains. Command me after this, if I can be of any service to you. The boys and I must get away now."

"Tell me the headquarters of Black Sam," said our hero, in a tone nothing commanding or dictatorial.

"In a cave somewhere on Whitewood Creek. I can't locate the point, only that it is north of Crook City. He says the devil himself could never find it."

"Maybe I can find it," said Lance, "and if I do, and things are as I suspect, it would be full as well for Black Sam if the devil found him. By-the-way, do you know any of his operations of late?"

"Nothing," said the chief, as he mounted his horse, Dave bringing up our hero's at the same moment: "nothing at all, only that he does busi-

ness on the road now and then. If you can't find him, I'll put one of my boys on his trail."

"One question more," said Lance, as he mounted his thoroughbred. "Is that reward open for the man who brings the 'Lion' to your camp? For me, if I bring him?"

For the first time since he put in his appearance that day, the robber chief laughed.

"No," said he, "I recall that offer. The 'Lion' is too many an animal for me."

"He's a hull menagery, you bet," said Laughing Luke.

"Don't yer furgit it," chimed in Bill Blood.

Five minutes later, and the ravine was left to the boulders and dead savages, the robbers riding north, Lance and Dave south.

CHAPTER XXI.

ACROSS COUNTRY—LANCE A PRISONER.

TWENTY minutes' rapid riding, and our hero and his companion overtook the two Denver men, who had ridden slowly along, and who were greatly pleased that the young fellow who had, perhaps, saved their lives, certainly their property, had escaped from the hands of the robbers.

They were not only profuse of thanks, but offered to reward Lance for the part he had taken in their behalf; but he declined to receive anything, saying that he was well paid for the adventure; not only in being able to do what he had done, but what he had learned—meaning in regard to "Black Sam," whom he knew to be "Cur" Smiggs.

"But who'll squar yer on that five thousand dollars, young un, which yer mout have got by takin' the 'Lion' ter the Tomtit's camp?" queried Dave, in a regretful tone, as if he thought Lance was too indifferent in regard to money matters.

"I doubt that he would have paid that sum," returned our hero, laughing. "I would liked to have tried him, though. It's all up now, however. Ha! there comes that cavalry troop yonder, I think."

As he spoke, several horsemen appeared on the knoll, about half a mile ahead, while in the rear, heads of others could be seen ascending.

"That's them for sart'n," said Dave; "'n' mebbe they'll ketch ther Tomtit, 'n' mebbe they won't," his sympathies evidently with the robber named, whom, half an hour before, he "itched" to shoot.

The party proceeded at a moderate canter, Dave telling the story of the Tomtit's offer to the Denver men, whose curiosity had been piqued by what he had before said, and who pressed him to enlighten them; which he did with much "gush" and hyperbole.

The cavalry advance came rapidly up, the progress of the quartette not being so rapid, on account of the led horses belonging to the Denver men.

In a few moments the two parties met, when the smaller one, led by Lance, was immediately ordered to halt, and at once surrounded by a dozen cavalry men, in charge of a lieutenant.

"Well, what is all this about?" was the bluff query of the latter, addressing Lance.

"Who is in charge of this troop?" was the query of Lance in return, the manner of the lieutenant not pleasing him.

"I am in command of this troop," replied the officer, in a haughty tone. Then to his men he gave the command—"Attention! Draw sabers;" when out flashed the sabers of the squad, Lance laughing heartily at the command pompously given.

"You are a thorough soldier, I see that," said he to the lieutenant, touching his hat mockingly in military salute, then asking, "who commands the company, sir?"

"Captain Van Vliet," returned the subordinate, haughtily.

"Then we will wait till Captain Van Vliet comes up," said Lance, and turned his back on the lieutenant, excusing himself as he did so.

"I rather think you will," said the subaltern with a sneer, sending a flash from his angry eyes at Lance, who saw it not, however, "for you look to me as though you might be one of the road agents we are looking for," he insultingly added.

Lance turned and gave him one glance of fire from his wondrous eyes, but said not a word. It was a glance of withering scorn and anger, before which the eyes of the lieutenant dropped at once.

The main part of the company soon reached the spot, where the captain, who seemed to understand his business, and how to go about it without being offensive, rode up to Mr. Woollen, who was leading his horses, getting his story

very shortly, which, of course, included the part taken by our hero, whose name, however, Mr. Woollen did not give, thinking it proper to omit it.

"Singular," said the captain, turning towards Lance, when the other had concluded, "that this young man—a mere boy—should have such influence with these robbers in the hills; very singular. Who are you, young man? What is your name?" he asked, in a tone of curiosity, closely scanning our hero, who, it must be remembered, was roughly and slouchily attired in one of his many disguises; and as far as that went, not very reputable in appearance.

"My name," said he, nonchalantly, and smiling as he spoke, "is Lancelot Dane—Lance, for short."

"Lance Dane!" quickly exclaimed the captain, in a tone of mingled surprise and satisfaction, looking sharply at our hero. "Lance Dane, eh? Well, young man, if that is your name, you are a prisoner. Deliver up your arms at once—Lieutenant Ray, receive his weapon."

Lieutenant Ray was the officer with whom Lance had had the tilt before the main portion of the cavalry company came up, and the reader may rest assured that the quick turn of affairs which operated so disadvantageously to our hero afforded him the utmost satisfaction; the light that danced in his eye and the smile that played on his lips more than attested this.

"A prisoner, am I?" said Lance, looking keenly at the cavalry captain, but betraying neither in tones or features the surprise he inwardly felt; then putting the query: "Could you, or would you tell me why I am thus made a prisoner, captain?"

"For robbing a party of emigrants on the way to the Black Hills, and another party on the road from Deadwood to Cheyenne, in this latter instance boldly proclaiming your name as leader of the robbers."

"W-h-e-w!" whistled our hero, and then with a glance at Dave, he burst out with laughter of the most hearty description.

"Surrender your arms," said the lieutenant, peremptorily, to Lance. "Corporal, take his weapons."

Lance gracefully passed over his rifle to the corporal who rode up, saying:

"Take good care of that 'Henry,' corporal, for a thousand dollars wouldn't buy it, and those pistols, too," he said, as he delivered up his revolvers. "Look out for them, for they are good ones, and I am used to them."

The lieutenant affected to be pleased at these remarks (very likely he was, as the matter appeared to him), and burst out laughing as Lance passed over his weapons.

"If you want the corporal to take care of these arms till they come into your possession again, you will impose a life-long trust upon him, my boy," he said, in a sarcastic tone.

"You think so, eh? All right; but you look out for those weapons all the same, corporal, I shall have further use for them in the Hills," saying this our hero again turned his back upon the lieutenant, this time without an apology.

When the captain had answered our hero's question, he turned towards Dave and scanned him as he had Lance—from head to foot.

"And who are you, my man, and what's your name?" he asked, Dave looking as though he would like to annihilate him and his company, the lieutenant especially, at whom he looked bayonets and broadswords.

"Wal, cap'n," said Dave, turning a huge quid in his mouth, "as ter who I am, I mout say as how if ther young 'un thar has robbed anybody—which he didn't—I'm one o' his pals, 'n' if he's a pris'ner, you'd better take me along too. That's all I've got ter say about it."

"Deliver up your arms," said the captain, at once, and then to the lieutenant he said: "You will return with the prisoners to Laramie, taking six men and a corporal. Corporal Riley there."

To the latter, who had received our hero's weapons, Dave was delivering his own, at the same time "speaking his mind" pretty freely in regard to the arrest of Lance, and offering a fabulous sum for the man who had "put up the job on him."

"Why, blame my skin," said he to the captain, "the young un, thar, has done more 'n' 's doing more ter make ther Monks 'n' Pluggs sick o' thar biz'ness than all ther sojers Uncle Sam hez got out yer. Why, he's crippled nigh onto—the Lord on'y knows how many—an' they're afeared o' him as cats is o' water. Why, that er's ther 'Lion'. You must hev hern o' the 'Lion,'" and the speaker looked at the cavalry captain as though confident of getting an affirmative reply, which, sure enough, he got.

"The 'Lion'—certainly I have heard of the 'Lion,'" returned the officer: "but certainly this boy cannot be he who bears that name," and a smile of incredulity came to his lips as he glanced at our hero, towards whom, at the mention made by Dave, every eye in the command had turned.

"Don't yer bet 'tain't him—ther 'Lion,'" said Dave, and was about to give further utterance, when Lance laughingly said:

"He doesn't take any stock in that, Dave; don't try to force it."

"If my testimony is of any weight, captain," said Mr. Woollen, "I can swear that the leader of the band of robbers declared this young man to be the 'Lion,' and seemed greatly pleased that he had him in his power, from which, however, he extricated my friend and myself and himself besides."

"Well—well," said the captain, "it may be so, but it hardly seems possible to me that he is the 'Lion,' of whose exploits I have heard much. However, if he is, he can easily establish his identity at Laramie, whither I must send him. I only hope that it will turn out that he is the 'Lion.'"

And the captain now looked at our hero with no little interest, his incredulous smile disappearing.

"If ther young 'un 'ud give yer one o' them blarin' looks o' his 'n of forty lion-power," said the irrepressible Dave to the captain, "yer'd think yer war struck by lightnin', 'n' all ther 'Lions' in Afriky was jest goin' fur yer."

This was so earnestly said, that the cavalrymen roared with laughter, and from the remarks of one or two, it is certain that Dave, and our hero, perhaps, would have been most unmercifully chaffed, had not the captain, who had been talking with Lieutenant Ray, ordered his men to fall in, and immediately given the command: "Forward!" leaving his subordinate to take the back track to Laramie.

CHAPTER XXII.

A SALOON IN SIDNEY—DAVE SUFFERS FOR LANCE.

FOUR days later, two young men, one fair and timid-looking, the other swarthy and brazen, were seated in a corner of one of the most frequented saloons of Sidney, a "city" said to contain more wickedness to the square rod than does Cheyenne to the square rood, though the latter has been called the "wickedest city in the world."

The place was crowded with men of all sorts below the "better class," some drinking jollily, some wrangling over their potations, some drinking alone and quietly, some "standing around," and some seated at tables playing cards, while Babel reigned and tobacco-smoke abounded.

The swarthy fellow, whose eyes resembled two black beads, was dressed "loudly," had the air of a swaggerer and the look of a treacherous scoundrel, if there is anything of physiognomy; the other somewhat younger, was quietly dressed, and had the air of one to whom the surroundings were uncongenial, and the look of a modest and troubled young man.

In the corner opposite sat Dave Plum smoking a pipe, with a tumbler not wholly emptied, on the table before him, and without appearing to do so, he was sharply watching the pair on the opposite corner.

The more respectable-looking, and younger of the two we have mentioned, had evidently just closed some interesting but painful narration, for the swarthy and loudly dressed individual said:

"Why, it was his gang that raided your camp, Clara—Clarence I would say—and he, no doubt, knows the whereabouts of your sister. Why, he's the devil's own, that fellow is, and raids and robs right and left with impunity; only about a week ago having the brazen effrontery to proclaim himself, after robbing a party on the way from Deadwood to Cheyenne."

"Two days after, he was captured by some cavalry and brought to Laramie, only to be released shortly after his arrival there. A most absurd idea exists that he can't be shot—I only hope that I may some day get a shot at him—and men invest him with more than natural powers, and are filled with fear and superstition in regard to him. He has been shot at and missed at close-quarters, I know; but the fools were dazed and scared out of their wits at the moment they fired, and so missed, of course."

"But I saw a man they called 'Redeye,'" interposed the other, "shoot at him three times at Cheyenne a week ago to-night, and not a bullet hit him. And another man there said he had

shot at him—I don't know how many times—and missed him."

"Well, Redeye was drunk," quickly said the swarthy individual, "and all unstrung with passion—I know it. As for the other, he was blowing for his friend, perhaps—for this fellow of whom such ridiculous stories are told; and how ridiculous to account a man more than mortal, as a good many do in his case."

"He has shot some of us—pshaw! what did I say 'us' for? He has shot some of the rough characters hereabouts—some of his own kidney—and by doing so, is looked on as a sort of regulator 'or' 'vigilante'—a foe of the hard characters of this region—and so, with this prestige, he emulates the most audacious robber chief in the hills—from the very fact that he is the most audacious of them all. But his day will soon come."

"Can it be possible that he is what you say?" said the swarthy fellow's companion, his blue eyes widening with surprise and pain, as he gazed at the other. "Why, he pledged me his word that he would do everything in his power to find my sister, or learn what had become of her. And he was so earnest, and so nice, too."

The young fellow looked inexpressibly sad, his reflections, no doubt, being painful.

From the words of the speaker, the reader will easily identify him as Charley May, the young fellow who had enlisted the sympathies of our hero in behalf of his lost sister; the other one, we may as well say, was Sam, "Cur" Smiggs.

"Ha—ha—ha!" laughed the latter; "so nice, eh? Yes, he is a nice plum, he is," he added, in a most sarcastic way. "Just the fellow to catch you—"

"Sh!" ejaculated his companion, warningly, glancing nervously around.

"So he vowed to rescue her, eh, Clarence?" said Smiggs, quickly. "Well, he won't, depend; but, happily, I may be able to do so. I am certain that it was his gang that raided your camp that night, and wherever is his camp, there your sister is to be found. I am so glad to have met you, Clar—Clarence, otherwise I might never have known of this affair. If I succeed in rescuing Mary from this young villain's power, you must plead my cause with her, Clarence, for I love her with all my heart, and am in an agony of fear and suspense. Wait here for a few moments—no one will disturb you—while I talk with a couple of men I see here, who may be able to tell the whereabouts of this robber's camp, and, perhaps, lend me assistance."

At these words, the scoundrel got up, saying, "I won't be long away," and left the table.

For the most part, when talking of our hero, he spoke in an ordinary tone, a good deal of what he had said being caught by Dave, who sat grinding his teeth with rage, and with a desire to annihilate the fellow, some reason or other deterring him from the attempt, while every now and then, casting his eyes towards the entrance to the saloon with an anxious look, he would mumble: "Why don't he come?"

Rising a moment after "Cur" Smiggs had left his companion, Dave stepped over to the latter and said:

"Parding, stranger, no 'fense; but mout not yer name be—lemme see—Charley? wal, warn't yer sister run off by some agents—savey? and didn't yer tell ther 'Lion' all about it over ter Che'enne last Saturday night, and didn't he promise ter find her ef he could, eh?"

The young fellow, whose pale face was quite handsome, stared almost wildly at Dave, and said nothing.

"Charley May—that's it, aren't it?—yer name, I mean," said Dave, who, at the instant, had recalled the name which he had heard from our hero.

"Yes—yes, that's my name," said the young fellow, hesitatingly, and looking greatly surprised.

"Good!" ejaculated Dave; "an' now arn't that other feller's name Spriggs, Sliggs, or Swiggs, or mebbe Priggs?"

"Smiggs—his name is Smiggs."

"That's ther name, young un, an' don't yer take no stock in him—don't yer. By-the-way, mout his first name be Sam?"

Getting an affirmative, Dave went on to say:

"I don't want ter say what he mout be, young un, but Dave Plum do say that he ar a liar from the word go. He war talkin' about ther 'Lion'—Lance Dane—wich he ar ther best young man in ther country, morilly, an' with ther rifle 'n pistol; an' I do pronounce that ar Sam Smiggs (a warning look from the young fellow Dave failed to notice, and continued)—damn him—I again pronounce him to be a liar from ther word go—that ar Sam Sliggs! An' dod rot his—"

Struck on the head from behind with the butt of a heavy revolver in the hands of Cur Smiggs, Dave dropped under the murderous blow, like a stricken ox to the floor, and knew no more.

Quickly explaining to those who rushed to the spot, that he had knocked down the man who had insulted his friend, Smiggs, who had two rough customers at his back, said to Charley May, grasping his arm as he spoke in a whisper:

"Come, Clarence—quick! Come, that's one of Lance Dane's gang. Let us get away from here as quick as possible."

Startled and confused by the brutal act of violence he had witnessed, the young fellow arose from his chair mechanically, and was dragged through the crowd and out of the saloon before he was hardly aware of the disposition made of him.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A SINGULAR CAVE—CUR SMIGGS AND HIS VICTIMS.

SEVERAL miles above Crook City, on the Whitewood Creek, there exists a singular cave.

It is situated on the northwest side of the creek, some 400 feet above the bed of the stream, opening into a limestone hill, but not from the exposed side thereof, the entrance being among a mass of rocks in a long, deep gully, that gives one the impression that the bottom of the hill in that spot has fallen in.

At the time we write of the entrance to this cave would have been as difficult to find as a needle in a haystack, by any one not knowing its location; and one might have seen it and never supposed it anything more than an irregular space, like hundreds of others, formed by the chaotic jumble of rocks all about.

Two days after the scene in Sydney we take our readers to this remarkable cave, which was at times made use of by Black Sam's gang.

The first chamber is about seventy-five feet long, of irregular width, varying from thirty to sixty feet. This leads to a second chamber, about two hundred feet in length, thirty feet in width and some ten feet high. From this you enter what might be called a gallery, six feet wide, fifty feet long and fifty feet high, the floor of which slopes considerably.

Through a small opening, some two and a half by three feet, you crawl on your hands and knees for a little distance, when you are confronted by a chasm some ten feet wide, which seems the beginning or end of a canon.

Light penetrates from afar through this gorge, and after a moment or two you can see that another chamber opens from the opposite wall of rock—but how to get there?

Well, at the right of the passage you are in, wider and higher than where you entered, you will find a plank about fifteen inches wide, which, if you are strong enough, you can push over to the floor of the chamber opposite; a not very difficult thing to do, as the plank is twice as long as the distance across, and the floor of the chamber lower than the passage which you are in.

We shove the plank and cross-ties with the reader into a chamber about thirty feet high, and nearly in the shape of a horse shoe, being about thirty feet high, some little light struggling through the fissures in the roof, which is festooned with calcareous spar—clear crystal when the coating of lime is removed.

In this chamber, whose atmosphere is not unpleasant and whose temperature is agreeable, there paces back and forth, like a denizen of the forest chafing in a cage, a young man—such to all appearance, but in reality a young woman—Miss Mary May, whom our hero pledged himself to discover, if possible, who is imprisoned in this dungeon of rock by Cur Smiggs, known to some of the toll-gatherers of the hills as Black Sam.

"My God!" she murmured, "will I ever be released from this horrible dungeon in the rock, or what will be my fate? Oh, I shall go wild—wild—mad, if I have to endure much longer this terrible imprisonment. But how can I escape? There is no way. The first day—the first hour—assured me of that. Oh, I shall become a maniac, I know I shall. Better jump into the chasm at once, than to become such. Or shoot him, the black-hearted villain. Thank God that I was enabled to retain my revolver and cartridges. Oh, Heaven—Heaven, what shall I do? Live and go mad, or die a suicide? Or live and yield to him? Never—never—never! I will die first, and he shall die, too! Thus will I shoot the villain—thus!" and the mentally tortured victim of the scoundrel, Smiggs, fired at the imaginary

form of her persecutor, a patter and rattle of countless reports being echoed and re-echoed through the calcareous chamber and canon.

Back and forth the young woman in masculine apparel paced, after firing the shot, silently communing with her thoughts.

A few moments and she broke forth again, unable to suppress her feeling.

"Oh, merciful Heaven, help me—help me, or I shall go crazy with my sufferings!" Then burst from her lips a shriek of agony intensified, such, we fancy, as some poor, suffering victim of the inquisition, ages ago, might have uttered when undergoing torture the most exquisite; and the echoes shrieked frightfully in return, with intensity exaggerated.

Much like the escape of steam from the safety-valve of a boiler when the pressure is too high, was that startling scream of the young woman—it saved her reason, possibly, for she had worked herself to such a terrible state of frenzy that the tension on her brain, after a long period of mortal suffering, might have proved too great for that organ's power of resistance.

A few moments of silence after the echoes died away, and the mentally tortured prisoner again broke out—continued silence in that place, brooding over her terrible position would have made her mad ere this.

"Oh, my father and sister! What must they have suffered, too, on my account. Oh, dear father, dear Clara! shall I ever see you again—ever—ever—ever?"

A momentary pause, and at the highest pitch of her voice she cried out: "Father—father! Clara—Clara!" the rock-ribbed chamber and the rock-walled canon giving back these names a hundred fold, and most mockingly.

"Cease, hush! you mocking fiend!" she loudly cried, arresting her steps for the first time, and stamping her foot as she spoke. "Oh, that my own name might be called, not by these unbodied voices of the gorge, nor by his—but by those of my kin. Shall I never hear it pronounced by loved and loving lips again? Mary—Mary!"

Through the chamber and the canon reverberated that sweetest name of woman—name of hallowed sound—and echo's multitudinous voices seemed tenderly to treat it, and had not ceased to utter it, when a voice singular in its tone, sepulchral, as though entombed in the rocks, and yet of considerable volume, and full of deepest concern, cried out:

"Mary—Mary!"

The suffering young woman who bore this name, who had again commenced her monotonous pacing, stopped as if paralyzed, uttering a shriek in wildest notes of mingled fright and doubt.

"Merciful Heaven!" she exclaimed, in a moment; "whose voice was that? Who called Mary? Speak, if you are not mocking."

"Mary, dear Mary—it is Clara!" replied the same strangely sounding voice, but clearer, as though it had more scope.

"Great Heaven—Clara!" fairly screamed Mary, in a tone of wildest joy, springing towards the mouth of the chamber, and so close to the brink of the canon, that one would have shuddered at her peril, seeing her.

Upon the passage opposite, whence came the voice, she bent her eyes, which, accustomed to the deep gloom about her, could distinguish the opening in the wall of rock at once, but which she strained to discover who might appear therein; wondering all the time under what conditions the advent of her sister Clara was about to be made, and trembling greatly with joy and fear.

Soon she perceived a crouching form opposite, then the plank projecting over the abyss, the end reaching the sill of her prison door; then an upright form appeared, which caused her to utter an agonized scream of disappointment, mingled with disgust—she had made out the form of "Cur" Smiggs.

"Back—back!" she cried, loudly and angrily, "or I will shoot you! I will, by the Heaven above!" and the click of the hammer, as she cocked her pistol, was a hundred times repeated by the echoing canon.

"Mary—Mary! for mercy's sake, don't shoot!"

It was the voice of her sister, now in its natural tones, though modified by the surroundings; and the next instant Mary could discern a second form rise up behind the first, which was now on the bridge that spanned the gorge, for such, of course, was the plank.

"Slide along after me, Clara," said the black-hearted Smiggs, in a soothing tone, as, guided by him, his left hand clasping her right wrist, she stepped upon the frail bridge; "there, that's it."

"Mercy, I shall fall, I know I shall," in af-

frighted tones, exclaimed Clara. "I shall be dizzy—oh, mercy!"

"Nonsense," said Smiggs, as he shoved his right foot along the plank, bringing up his left and pulling the frightened girl along. "Nonsense! there's nothing to make you dizzy but imagination, for you can see no depth below you—come!" The tone of the wretch was rude now, and struck terror into the heart of the girl he led, and caused that of the other to sink in her breast.

Sliding along and down the plank, pulling the trembling victim of his treachery after him, the villainous Smiggs stopped when within two feet of the chamber to the rock, and to its occupant, who stood near the end of the plank, said in a devilishly sarcastic tone:

"Now thank me, my cold beauty, for bringing your sister here; or shoot me if you will. Come, dear one, thank or shoot—do!"

"Monster, I curse you—curse you," exclaimed his victim with impassioned hatred.

The other now fully realized her own dreadful position, and how she had been made the victim of the blackest treachery.

She uttered one wild scream of anguish and tottered—merciful Heaven! from the plank. No—he grasps her firmly, and she is safe.

"What!" he exclaimed, paying little heed to the one he had held, but addressing the other, "what, no thanks, only curses for me, my proud queen, and here I have just saved your sister's life."

"Thank him, Mary, for God's sake, thank him," exclaimed Clara, "and let me get over there; I shall die here. You monster!" she then ejaculated, at the head of Smiggs, "I know your villany now, and that you infamously lied about that young man whom they called the 'Lion'—he will rescue us yet, and woe unto you!"

"Ha—ha—ha!" and the canon echoed and re-echoed the sardonic laughter. "Poor fool, he never could find you living, much less dead—and know that he is dead. 'Twas I who shot him. Ha—ha—ha!"

"It is false—false—false! You tell it to drive me to despair. You could not shoot him. Heaven will guide him here, and he will rescue us. Let me reach my sister, you villain!"

"Yes, you shall reach your sister, if she will throw her pistol into the canon," said the scoundrel, in a quiet and firm tone.

"Never! and be at your mercy, monster?" exclaimed Mary, with anger, but firmness.

A scream of ineffable terror from the lips of Clara instantly followed these words. She had been whirled on the plank with her back to Smiggs, tightly grasped by both of her arms, and swung from her foothold over the black abyss of unknown depth, and with the scream she swooned.

"Throw that pistol into the canon," said the atrocious villain to the other sister, in a cold, dispassionate tone which argued a fiendish resolve on his part; "throw it, or by Heaven and hell I will drop your sister to—to the devil knows where!"

"Once more, I tell you," he continued, "drop that pistol into the canon, or I'll drop this girl—my arms are getting tired."

There was no mistaking the purpose of the devilish scoundrel, should his demand not be complied with—his tone was all too convincing—and his victim in the rock-chamber near him could not doubt that he would fulfill his diabolical threat; so, with the fearful consequences of a refusal held up to her by the monster who would plunge her sister to a terrible fate, now holding her senseless over a black abyss of unknown depth, she hurled the pistol (with a curse at Smiggs) into the canon, the weapon exploding as it struck the opposite wall.

"Would to Heaven I had shot you, monster! killed you before this day!" she exclaimed, as the weapon left her hand.

"No—no, Mary," calmly said the scoundrel, raising the inanimate form of Clara, and with it stepping across the remainder of the plank to the chamber in the rock; "no—no, you cannot wish you had shot me, and lived a murderess. You would have been uncomfortable all the rest of your life."

These last words were uttered as she to whom they were addressed, clasped the inanimate form of her sister to her breast, and no reply was made to them.

"Now be thankful, Mary, that I have brought you your sister to keep you company," the infernal scoundrel said, as he relinquished the inanimate form of Clara into the arms of the other; "be thankful—you had ought to be."

"You are a devil, Sam Smiggs, a devil!" his captive exclaimed, and in her tone were con-

trated all the scorn and hatred her nature could command.

"Oh, how thankless, how ungenerous and calumnious art thou, Mary," said the villain, in a tone of mock solemnity; and then his sardonic laughter rung out through the calcareous chamber and canon; and it was as though a thousand fiends, near and afar, were laughing in discordant chorus.

While the canon yet resounded with this sardonic discord, Clara ("Charley," alias "Clarence,") May recovered nearly to consciousness in the arms of her sister.

"My God! what a dream; oh, the light is out," she languidly exclaimed, in a confused way, as the door of her intellect was thrown ajar and she opened her eyes.

"Clara—my sister—Clara," exclaimed Mary, and in tones so thrilling as to arouse her sister to complete consciousness, when the two most fervently embraced, for the moment, perhaps, not thinking, in their mutual joy, of the strange, not to say terrible position they were in, nor of the black-hearted scoundrel present, who had brought them to such a pass, and who stood not far from them with folded arms, and a diabolical smile on his lips—no doubt—if the latter could have been seen.

CHAPTER XXIV.

CATCHING A TARTAR—A FEARFUL EXPEDIENT.

THE fervor of the sisterly embrace over, Clara, who was not devoid of spirit on occasions—as was shown during the strange duel between our hero and Redeye, in Cheyenne—as was not Mary, also, released herself from the latter's arms, and taking one step towards Smiggs, said:

"Well, sir—no, you are not fit to be so addressed, you most infamous liar and villain. As such I address you, and ask what you intend to do with us, now you have got us in this stone tomb? Speak, you most wicked man."

"Tame you—tame her," meaning Mary, "at all events," returned Smiggs, with a diabolical laugh. "It will be easier now she has no pistol."

"Oh, you coward!" exclaimed Mary, and one could fancy living fire flaming in her eyes.

"You won't tame her nor me, either, you monstrous wretch!" exclaimed Clara, pulling forth as she spoke a tin case not unlike a small sardine box, clasp it tightly and holding it up. "Not while I have this," she went on to say, "which contains fulminate of mercury, made by my father, will you tame either of us, you God-forgotten wretch!"

At the mention of the terrible compound contained in the case, which, if dropped by its possessor, would instantly have annihilated the stone chamber and torn to shreds its three occupants, Smiggs, to whom true courage was a stranger, gave a visible start, and stood trembling like a craven cur, as he was.

"Why, Clara," said he at length, with nothing of arrogance now in his tone, nor brutal threatening, "you would destroy yourself and sister, as well as me, should you drop that infernal stuff. For God's sake, be careful."

"Be careful, you cringing coward," Clara exclaimed, with contempt the most withering; "yes, I will be careful—careful that it leaves my hand only when I determine. I know the consequence, should I drop it, as well as you—instant destruction. Now, when will you begin your taming process, you miserable Sam Smiggs?"

The sarcastic woman, now thoroughly aroused, shook the hand that clasped the case of fulminate right in the very face of the scoundrel who had abducted her and her sister, and his swarthy face, we venture to say, was overcome with a sickly pallor, the absence of sufficient light preventing the showing; and barring his trembling, the craven wretch stood motionless and silent as a statue. He had caught a Tartar, and got more than he bargained for.

"Yes; when will you begin the taming?" exclaimed Mary May; "there's two of us now, and you could not tame one—me alone." Turning suddenly to her sister, as some thought flashed through her brain, she whispered in her ear.

Whatever she had to say met with instant approval, for Clara, quick as a flash almost, made a step towards the scoundrel, Smiggs, who stood between the sisters and the plank, and said:

"We mean to leave this place—the tomb—and at once! Rather than be held here, we are determined to die; and if we die, you die! Stand aside and let us pass over this plank, or I will dash this case on the rock at our feet, when eternity will open for us all!"

The spirited and determined girl resolved, with her sister, to the desperate and terrible extremity threatened by her, turned her left side to the actually quaking scoundrel, and raised high her right arm, the hand grasping the terrible compound, the possession of which would completely frustrate the nefarious designs of Cur Smiggs, if not enable the sisters to dictate their own terms and free themselves from his power.

"Move!" she cried, determinedly, "or the end is now?"

"For God's sake, Clara, hold a moment!" cried the quivering wretch. "You shall go, both of you, I swear it! I repent what I have done, I assure you both, but hear me. My men are in these outer caverns, and you never can pass them alive. Nor can I take you out of the cave, girls, without breaking my oath. Remain here one hour, and I will have them miles from the cave—be with them myself—when you can leave the place in safety. Cross that plank and enter these outer chambers, now, and—well, you can guess your fate—I cannot save you."

There was so much apparent sincerity in his tones, so much of seeming truth in what he said, that Clara dropped her arm, and turned to her sister, when the two went into a whispered conversation, the first mentioned at length addressing Smiggs:

"You lied to me so outrageously, Sam Smiggs, and deceived me so cruelly, that I have not the least confidence in what you say; it looks plausible, but you may be deceiving us again."

"Swear on your knees, with your hands on high," interposed her sister, "that you are telling me the truth, and will leave clear the way out of this place—swear, on pain of your soul's forfeiture."

Down on his knees went Smiggs instantly, and with uplifted hands swore to deliver his victims, and in the most solemn manner called upon Heaven to curse him with a life most miserable on earth, and doom his soul to endless torment if he proved recreant to his oath.

None could have been more earnest, serious or solemn than Smiggs at that moment, and the victims of his baseness and treachery were ready the next moment to trust him—they were women too easily convinced.

"I'll trust him after that," whispered Clara to Mary.

"So will I—he dare not break that oath!" returned the latter, who then said to Smiggs as he arose to his feet: "We will trust you. You dare not invite the penalties you invoke by the breaking of that oath. We will wait here an hour, as you proposed, and let the hour begin at once."

Smiggs understood the hint, and stepped upon the plank to cross the chasm, when Clara checked him by saying: "One moment—tell me truly if that young man—the 'Lion'—is dead?"

"I will tell you truly," returned Smiggs, in a tone of thorough truthfulness—"he is dead, but I did not shoot him, as I said; he was shot by my men yesterday, while searching for the cave."

Clara, replacing the case of fulminate in the pocket of the coat she wore, heaved a deep sigh, and clasped her arms about the neck of her sister, who embraced her in return, the two for a moment oblivious of their situation and surroundings.

Suddenly Mary broke from the mutual embrace, a scraping sound having startled her.

"My God!" she exclaimed, in a terrified whisper, "he has pulled away the plank—the perjured villain! Oh, what fools we were!"

"Ha-ha-ha!" laughed the fiend from the opposite passage, a thousand fiendish voices in the canon giving back the sardonic laughter. "Yes, what fools!" cried out the scoundrel, who had heard Mary's last words; "yes, what fools!" he repeated, hoarsely hissing out the words, plunging the plank into the black abyss as he spoke. "Stay there and starve!" he cried out to his victims opposite, with fiendish malignity in his tones. "Starve, and tame as you starve! Ha-ha-ha! And you, Miss Clara, think of that nice young man as you starve and grow weak, and grow tame! That oath of mine—do you think I care for it? Bah! oaths forced by threats of death, and taken under fear of destruction, are righteously broken; neither divine nor human law will hold one to their keeping. But if I break the oath made in mortal fear, I will keep my word in this—that there you shall stay and starve—starve—starve! and no human power shall save you! Good-by for three days, when I will come to hear you beg for food and water, and every day after that, until you are raving with thirst. Ha-ha-ha! who holds the fulminate now?"

From the first words of the fiend, which be-

trayed his hellish purpose, the two sisters had been discussing their terrible situation, and had decided how to act, as was evident when Clara passed Mary the tin case of fulminate, the latter saying:

"Better this, dear Clara, than a lingering, horrible death by starvation and thirst, to which this monstrous fiend has surely doomed us. One thing, he will die—the fiend—and Heaven may protect us? One last embrace, dear Clara, if it must be the last. There, now, go back—"

"No, I will stay here, Mary."

"As well, perhaps, dear Clara," said the latter, and raising her eyes fervently, implored the mercy of Heaven, her sister joining.

Just then it was that the infernal scoundrel, Smiggs, after his sardonic expressions of laughter, in devilishly sarcastic tones put the query:

"Who holds the fulminate now?" and turned to crawl through the passage.

Pressing the hand of her sister—a last farewell, perhaps—Mary stepped quickly to the mouth of the chamber in the rock—almost to its very edge—and raising her right arm, cried out in response:

"I hold the fulminate now, and you have one second for prayer," saying which, with a silent invocation to Heaven, she hurled the tin case containing the terrible compound with all her strength, and with certain aim, into the dark mouth of the passage opposite.

Instantly there followed an explosion of the most tremendous, most terrific character, even of itself, but which the echoing canon exaggerated to a degree that was appalling—a though the thunderer had discharged a myriad of bolts at one and the same instant to shake the earth to its center.

Then came the crash of falling rocks, and the rumble and roar, and jar, as they tumbled into the canon, and chaos had come.

CHAPTER XXV.

LANCE SUDDENLY APPEARS—HE COWS A BULLY.

DAVE PLUM was not so hard headed but that he could be felled by a blow that would have felled an ox; but his occiput was sufficiently hard to resist the blow he received without being fractured, even though consciousness deserted him for a few moments.

When at length he came to, after a short period of oblivion, it was "all at once," so to speak, without any preliminary skirmishing on the part of his briefly scattered senses.

Rising to his feet he shook himself, and rubbed his head, and looking into the corner where Cur Smiggs and Charley May had sat, said:

"I don't know fur sartin, boys, who 'twas slugged me, but I'd swar 'twas that ar' black 'n' tan cuss a settin' yonder awhile ago, wich his name it ar' Swiggs, Sliggs, or Squiggs. I'll gamble on 't."

"He was the chap," said one of the crowd, standing about, a fellow about Dave's size and build, and not remarkable for his amiable looks.

"Wal, the Lord help him ther first time my lamps gits sot on him," said Dave, discarding an exhausted, and inserting a fresh quid of tobacco as he spoke.

"H'm," sneered the other, and then said: "I reckon as how he can take ker of hisself, an' reckon again that you're a duffer."

Dave stared at the fellow for a moment, with something like contempt, and then said in his drawling way—the way of many of those western men:

"What mout be that word, stranger, which you 'plied to me?"

"Duffer; that's what I said, cully," was the response, in a most aggravating tone, and with a sneer. "A duffer, and I can get away with you in three minutes by the clock!"

The bystanders became deeply interested now, and looked at Dave, not a little anxiously, some of them wondering, no doubt, what would follow from him.

"Duffer, eh?" drawled Dave, as if utterly unconcerned, and expectorating half a tumbler full of tobacco juice. "Wal, stranger," he continued, "it arn't polite to tell a man he lies; besides it's dangerous sometimes—but I ain't no duffer, an' you can't git away with me in three minutes by the clock—you can't!"

"You jest put up your daddles, then," said the fellow, and "squared off" as he uttered the words, adding: "I feel just like havin' a little exercise this mornin'."

"I'll 'commodeate yer, stranger, 'f yer'll tell me why for yer lit onto me in this ornary way. Ar it on account o' ther black-an-tan cuss that

wur yer just now? Mebbe you're one of his gang?"

"Mebbe I am," said the other quickly; but you'd rather guff than play your fives. Here's for that snuff trap o' yours;" and the bully, who no doubt thought he had a pigeon whom he could easily pluck, let fly his right "bunch of fives" for Dave's nose.

He reckoned without his host, however, for Dave, quick as a flash, stopped the blow with his left forearm, and dealt the fellow a tremendous whack on the cheek with his open right hand, staggering him almost to a fall.

So unexpectedly and cleverly had Dave turned the tables on the bully, that the bystanders set up a loud guffaw, which so incensed the fellow—the flat-of-the-hand blow which marked Dave's contempt of him, had roused his ire—that the instant he regained steady footing he pulled a revolver—invariably the way of the bully when discomfited in such affairs, if supplied with such a weapon.

Before he could use it, however, a hand was laid on his wrist, while a voice of imperative command, said:

"Don't you shoot! Put up that pistol!" And the hand and voice that stayed the ruffian were those of Lance the "Lion."

The fellow became black with rage, and glared at the speaker like a wild beast; but in fewer seconds than it takes to tell it, his eyes winked and blinked, and watered as though dazzled by too intense a light; while it was noticeable that he did not move his pistol hand.

"Who are you?" he at length sullenly demanded of Lance, who had released his wrist.

"No matter," replied the latter. "Who are you that draws like a cur on your betters? Put up that pistol."

The fellow obeyed like one in complete subjection to the will of another, but he did so with a scowl as black as midnight, and an oath as wicked as it well could be, which were not at all in keeping with his ready obedience.

Our hero, arrayed in his suit of bright buckskin, with his trusty "Henry," and the eight chambered revolvers, all of which weapons he had surrendered for a short time, at the command of the cavalry captain, now turned from the cowed bully towards Dave, whose eyes beamed with pleasure as they looked upon his friend.

Holding out his horny hand, which was taken by Lance, Dave said, in an undertone:

"I think he ar' one o' ther Black-'n'-tan's gang," indicating the black-browed bully.

"What gang is that?" replied our hero, laughing.

"Why, Black Sam, young 'un. I seen him—war yer a leetle while ago, an' I thought black-'n'-tan would suit his complexion—Swiggs, Sliggs or Spriggs, yer know."

"You saw him, did you—this Smiggs?" asked Lance, with much interest. "Know it was him, eh? Come, sit down here."

Turning then to the bully he had so effectually subdued, as far as any violent demonstrations were concerned, he said:

"Don't go, I want to see you shortly."

"The devil take you," roared the fellow, adding: "You go to—"

"You stay there," broke in Lance, and with Dave proceeded to the table in the corner where Cur Smiggs had sat.

The bully stood in his track and cursed, but, strange to say, did not move, and while some of the bystanders chaffed him, the most of them followed our hero with their eyes, greatly wondering at the power he had exercised over the other. It happened that none present knew him; but one of them remarking that he "shouldn't wonder if he was the feller they called the 'Lion,'" a number immediately became satisfied that such was the case, while others pooh-poohed and scouted the idea.

Dave had the story to tell to our hero of what had transpired previous to the appearance of the latter; and in his slow, drawing way he told it. He finished at length with this: "I'm dead sure, young 'un, that he (meaning the bully), ar' one o' ther Black-'n'-tan gang, I am."

"A good thing that he tried to pick a quarrel with you, if he is one of Black Sam's gang," said Lance; "for he can be of service to us in finding that scoundrel's cave."

Turning to the fellow, who had not budged from the spot where he had been commanded to stand, our hero soon caught his eye, and beckoned to him, the bully coming up like a well-trained dog; others sauntering after.

"Sit down," said Lance, shoving a chair to the fellow. Leaning over him he whispered: "You are one of Black Sam's gang—I know it."

"It's a damned lie!" ejaculated the bully, his brow as black as a thunder cloud.

"You are, I tell you!" insisted Lance; then in a low undertone he said: "You were one of the gang that robbed a Denver party two or three weeks ago, and carried off one of them. If I give you away, it is not very likely that you would leave this place without a rope around your neck."

The assertions of our hero were made at a venture; but the face of the quailing bully, which turned ghastly pale, told that they had struck home.

"I don't propose to give you away," said Lance, satisfied now of his man, and greatly pleased; "not," he went on to say with emphasis, "if you will pilot me to Black Sam's cave on the Whitewood Creek."

The fellow started at this mention.

"How did you know of the cave?" he asked, with evident surprise.

"It does not matter; you must take me there."

"I shall be shot if I do."

"You will be hanged if you don't."

The fellow was silent for a moment, thinking.

At length he said:

"I can tell you how to find it—"

"That won't do," broke in Lance. "It will be a great deal safer for us to have you along; otherwise you might arrange for a surprise party on the ambuscade principle, which would give us altogether a too warm a reception. No; you must go along, and we start now. I think we can arrange things before we get there, so that you won't suffer at the hands of your confreres. Come—I am going."

Our hero and Dave arose from their seats, the other rising just after them, all three immediately leaving the saloon, our hero the cynosure of all eyes.

CHAPTER XXVI.

LANCE FINDS THE CAVE—A TERRIBLE MOMENT.

It was about noon on the second day after the scene in Sidney depicted in the preceding chapter, when our hero and Dave Plum rode north from Crook City up the Whitewood Creek.

The fellow Lance had pressed into his service in Sidney had been left behind in the city before mentioned, and in safe hands.

He had given Lance the most minute directions for the approach to and finding of the cave, and had begged so hard not to be taken beyond Crook City, dreading lest he should fall a victim to the vengeance of some of the band of which he was a member, in case he was seen in the neighborhood of the secret retreat of Black Sam's, that our hero concluded to trust to his directions and leave him behind, particularly as he could place him in safe keeping.

He had received from the robber the password of the gang (Atokad, Dakota reversed); but as the fellow declared that it was never used except at night, when too dark to distinguish forms and faces in approaching the cave or in other places, it would not, probably, be of any advantage to him.

It was rough riding over the country they were traveling, and the progress of our hero and his companion was consequently not very rapid; still they made fair headway, and at length reached the vicinity of the ford where they were to cross the creek, no inconsiderable stream at times.

The ford crossed, they proceeded north for a considerable distance, meeting with no live thing, when they came to a clump of trees, in which they were to leave their horses, the approach to the cave now being up a very steep hill of limestone for four hundred feet, then down into a deep gully, as previously described.

Lance and his companion were soon on the ridge forming the lower side of the gully and overlooking the latter, seeing nothing but an immense jumble of rocks below them, with masses, here and there, of clear, crystalized spar glistening in the sun.

"I guess that ar chap give us ther right steer," said Dave, as he looked over the mass; "it looks jest as he said."

"Sure, I think," returned Lance; "and about over there," pointing as he spoke, "is the entrance. Now I'll tell you what—shoot on sight if anyone shows himself. If we reach the cave without that, I shall shout the password; that will be sure to bring anyone within to the entrance, when there will be no questions asked by us. Come."

With their rifles slung over their backs, and each with a revolver in hand, the two descended the ragged declivity, and were soon picking their way over the jagged rocks—a very difficult way indeed.

"Looks so an earthquake had been 'round yer,

or a ton o' nitro-what-ye-call-it," said Dave, as he labored on.

At length our hero stopped before an almost perpendicular rock, some twenty feet high by fifteen broad and two thick, the top and one side straight as though cut by a chisel. Back of this, in a jumbled mass of rocks, was an opening, irregular in form, not unlike hundreds of others to be seen there, some six feet high and two wide. This was the entrance to the cave, and our hero waited till Dave came up a moment later than he, and then shouted at the top of his voice:

"Atokad!"

Half a minute, and out marched an astonished-looking fellow, pistol in hand. He dropped before he could fairly take in the situation, shot in the right shoulder and knee.

He had scarcely fallen, when a second appeared, only to fall as quickly as his fellow, shot through the neck by Dave; neither of the two having spoken a word.

No more appearing, our hero again shouted the password, when the robber first shot, said:

"Thar's no more in thar 'cept Black Sam, 'n' he's in ther bridal chamber, 'n' can't hear yer holler."

This was pleasing information, and our hero and Dave at once entered the passage to the cave, which has already been described.

In the first chamber they found a lighted lantern, with which they made their way into the second chamber; soon they were in the gallery previously described, and were proceeding down the sloping, slippery floor thereof, Lance examining the right-hand wall for an outlet, when an appalling sound smote their ears, as though the foundations of the hills had burst asunder, while the shock they had experienced was terrific in the extreme.

"Arthquake, by—"

Before Dave could finish, the wall they had examined cracked with a deafening report—crack—crack—it went like the ring of a steel cannon.

"Heaven save us!" fervently ejaculated Lance. And only Heaven could save them, for with a roar and crash indescribable, down came the right-hand wall of the gallery.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE SISTERS DISCOVERED—THE HONEST MINERS.

ABOUT five minutes after Lance and Dave passed into the cave, over the bodies of the two robbers they had shot, two others of the robber gang appeared upon the scene, about a hundred yards from the cave's entrance, towards which, clambering over the blocks of limestone, they made their way from a point considerably to the north of whence our hero started to find the cave.

"Holy Smoker!" suddenly exclaimed one of the two, and then turning to his companion, put the query: "What's that, Bill?"

A dull, but heavy rumbling sound, and a violent trembling of the rocks around, had called forth the exclamation and the query.

"The mount'n's in labor, Jake," rejoined the other, with a coarse laugh.

While yet his rude laughter was ringing up the rocky gorge, there was a movement of the rocks in their front, as though some huge Titan, embowed in the earth beneath, was trying to free himself from the incubus that pressed him down.

Then came the sudden and violent upheaval of a crash of a mass of rocks, with crack and crash and rumbling roar; then all became quiet, with only a cloud of lime-dust to remind one of the late terrifying commotion.

The two men looked at one another with the wildest astonishment, not to say terror, for a moment, when the one who had been the first to speak previously, exclaimed:

"Holy Smoker, Bill, was that 'n earthquake? Thunder 'n lightnin', what was it, anyhow?" and the fellow's tone was full of terror.

"It mout ar be'n a airthquake—I don't know," rejoined the other, looking around. "But look thar," he continued, pointing towards a spot about a hundred feet to the right of, and forty feet below them, where could be seen dimly through the dust of the powdered lime-stone two human forms lying prone upon a flat surface of rock some twenty feet square, their garments as white with the powdered lime as all the rocks around.

"By all the buckin' mules in Dakota!" exclaimed Jake, the first speaker, "who are them, and how'd they git thar? They ain't none o' the boys, Bill."

"Don't know—let's see," said the latter, and started for the spot, saying: "It's more'n a mouse

the old mount'n's brought. That ar the bridal-chamber, sure, an' it may be the boss an' that ar Denver gal that's lyin' thar. But how'n thunder'd this thing happen, anyhow?"

"That's what I'd like to know," said Jake; "what busted things?"

Clambering over the slippery blocks of limestone, thickly coated with powdered lime, the two men made their way as quickly as possible toward the spot where lay prone the two motionless forms they had discovered, reaching it after several moments and no little difficulty.

The one called Bill was the first to reach and turn over one of the inanimate bodies, which was that of Mary May, his companion coming up a moment later, and turning the body of her sister face upwards.

"This is the Denver gal, Jake," said Bill, raising to a sitting posture the body of Mary, and brushing the dust from her face.

"Wal, this ain't the boss by a long sight," said Jake, raising Clara's body in turn; "an' who'n thunder ken it be?"

At that instant Mary opened her eyes, gave a hurried and bewildered glance about her, and seeing her sister, screamed "Clara!" in a tone of fright.

"Oh—ho! this ar another gal," said Jake; and lacking any deeper knowledge of means to be used in cases like the one in hand, he blew in the face of the girl, and patted her back pretty soundly. The effect desired could not have been produced any more quickly by any other means, the girl reviving almost immediately, calling out the name of her sister as the latter had done.

A moment, and both were on their feet, and in each others' arms, apparently but little the worse for the shock which had stunned them to unconsciousness, and during this sisterly embrace, when each thanked Heaven most fervently for what seemed a most miraculous escape, the two men were exchanging significant glances.

"Isn't it wonderful?" said Clara, at length.

"Miraculous!" ejaculated Mary, in response. Then, turning from her sister toward the two men, she said: "I suppose you found us here—did you not? For mercy's sake do take us away from this place, or show us which way to go to reach the nearest settlement."

"We'll do it, marm," said Bill, with a quick glance at his companion, adding: "An' I guess we'd better git out ez quick as we ken, too, for thar's queer doin's among these rocks when they git cavortin around ez they did a minute er two ago. But how did you git here, marm—you 'n' your sister? I vow it ar' the most wonderful thing to me 'n' Jake—"

"Don't ask us to stop here to tell how we got here," broke in Mary, most impatiently, starting to leave the spot, taking Clara by the hand.

"Hold on, don't go that way," said Bill, instantly; "if you do, you mout be scalped afore yer know'd it. Thar's Injuns about this yer neighborhood—just up north thar."

"Indians! Mercy!" exclaimed Clara, in tones of extreme apprehension, glancing hurriedly and nervously about, then anxiously asking: "Which way shall we go?"

"Come this way," said Bill, with a wink to his companion, unobserved by the sisters, and pointing in a direction opposite to that which Mary had taken.

"Come," said Clara to her sister, pulling her by the hand, completely unnerved by the fear inspired by the mention of the proximity of Indians.

"Wait," said Mary, not so exercised about unseen Indians as doubtful about the two white men at hand. "Wait," she repeated, and then addressing Bill, asked: "Who are you two men?"

"We are miners, miss, out prospectin'," answered the lying scoundrel, adding: "You needn't be afear'd of us, we'll see yer safe and sound down to Crook City, 'n' out of danger, which is lyin' around loose all the time hereabouts: Injuns 'n' robbers making it hot fur everybody but their kind."

"That's what we are, miners, honest miners," interposed Jake, looking and speaking with all the honesty he could put into his eyes and tongue.

Mary scanned the two men closely. They were rough-looking fellows, and armed; but miners are rough fellows generally, and in that region invariably armed. "Robber" was not stamped upon their faces, and as critically as these were examined by the young woman, she could read nothing there that would warrant her to believe the two men were not what they represented themselves; still, she was doubtful.

"Whether you speak truly or falsely," she said, looking at Jake, who, of the two, appeared the most trustworthy, "I cannot tell. But if you

are men,"—she glanced from Jake to Bill—"and ever had sisters, I conjure you to lead us out of this to a place of safety. Can we trust you?"

"Yer kin, miss," answered Bill, but with an eager promptness that was suspicious, adding, immediately: "Jest ez if we war yer brothers, eh, Jake?"

"Sure," rejoined the latter, "sure 'ez preachin'." Bill 'n' I is straight, miss—yer kin bet on us ev'ry time;" and the rascal raised his hat and bowed awkwardly, after addressing Mary May.

"God grant that you are," said the latter; "but you will satisfy us of your truthfulness by letting each of us have a revolver—you have two apiece. Will you do it?"

"Sartin'," quickly answered Bill, with a significant glance at his companion; "sartin'—thar's mine, 'n' Jake 'll let yer sister hev one o' hisn," saying which, he handed Mary one of his pair of revolvers, Jake pulling forth one of his and passing it to Clara.

Immediately after this the quartette left the spot, the robber assisting the sisters over the jumbled mass of limestone block, being as careful and attentive as though suitors of the two, and guiding them over the difficult, not to say dangerous, way.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ENTOMBED ALIVE—BLACK SAM'S DOOM.

At the terrible sound made by the cracking of the wall of rock which our hero had been examining, he and Dave sprang back and dashed up the sloping floor of the gallery they were in, not knowing but they were to be crushed by the falling rocks and entombed beneath them.

Providentially they reached the opening into the large chamber, into which they dashed like a couple of lions dashing from the jungle into the open.

This they cleared, reaching the outer chamber in a very few seconds, when our hero, finding that everything was firm around him, stopped short, his companion being brought to an instant later by a word from him.

"It's all over, Dave, I think, whatever it was," he said, as the other stopped.

"I should hope so," said Dave; "I don't want no more on't, I don't. I'd rather face Settin' Bull 'n' his whole gang o' red cut-throats, than go through that ar 'sperience agen, I had."

"I don't know but I would myself, Dave," said Lance, examining the lantern he carried. "For the moment," he added, "it was something frightful. But as I said, whatever the trouble was, it is evidently all over; so let us go back and see what has happened; I am anxious to find out."

"Go on," said Dave, "I'll go whar you go, but I'd rather go t'other way, I had. Thar mout be another rumpus thar in the bowels of the airth—who knows?"

"All right, Dave, I'll take the chances myself—better I should, in case anything should happen further."

"If you go, 'n' I know yer will, Dave Plum ain't a go'n' ter turn tail, young 'un. Git on, I'm goin' along."

It would have been useless then for Lance to have attempted to persuade Dave to remain behind, under the circumstances; and knowing this, he moved towards the entrance to the second chamber, and into the latter, Dave right at his heels.

From this the two passed into the gallery, whose sloping floor they traversed by the wall on the right for some thirty feet, when by the lantern's light they could see that a large breach had been made in the wall of rock, irregular, of course, and some twenty by thirty feet.

Standing by the breach they could see open daylight some little distance ahead, while the light carried by Lance enabled them to see that the way before them was over a confused mass of rocks, tumbled pell-mell together, over which, to the daylight beyond, it would be exceedingly difficult to proceed.

"This was a natural tumble down, I think," said Lance.

"An' thar's mebbe some more on't," rejoined Dave, not altogether at his ease.

"Well, I am going to take the chances and make for that daylight yonder," said Lance, and stepped into what was really another chamber or cavern, of not irregular shape, whose floor was a chaotic mass of limestone boulders.

"An' I'm with yer, young 'un," said Dave, and followed in the footsteps of our hero.

Slow work they made, for Lance, who led—they could not go abreast—was forced, after finding foothold for himself, to hold the lantern

in the rear for Dave, who was not so light and sure of foot as he.

They had worked along towards the spot where the light of day met their eyes, some ten minutes, when they were startled by a deep groan, a sepulchral and unintelligible utterance following a moment later.

"Jerusalem crickets!" ejaculated Dave; "what's that?"

Not the substance of four score savages, mounted and armed, and surrounding Dave, would have struck such terror to his soul as did that deep, sepulchral, and most unearthly groan and utterance, and when the groan, long drawn out, was repeated, he would have given all to be above ground, no matter what might be the circumstances there.

"Holy Moses!" he exclaimed, in accents of wildest terror; "let's git out er this cussed place, young un—it's haunted, sartin."

"Nonsense," said Lance, "some one is under these rocks, and hurt."

"Jehovah help him, then, fur nobody on this airth ken," exclaimed Dave, feeling somewhat relieved at the words of our hero, and evincing no little concern in his tones.

"Halloo below there!" shouted Lance, stooping as he gave cry, which was echoed and re-echoed a score of times.

A smothered cry came up from the rocks beneath him—a cry in which pain and terror, anguish and despair were blended—and in a moment was repeated, seemingly fathoms deep in the bowels of the earth.

Lance gave the lantern to Dave to hold, while he carefully got down to an opening among the blocks of stone, large enough to admit his body, at the mouth of which, after ascertaining that its direction was downward, he called out loudly: "Who's there?"

"It's me, Sam," came back in sepulchral tones in a moment, and seemed to come from a dozen different points in the bowels of the earth.

"Sam who?" called out Lance.

"Black Sam—they call me," was returned in a broken way, as the speaker's utterance was interrupted by throes of pain, the voice plainly indicating intense suffering.

"Is it Sam Smiggs?" our hero asked immediately.

"Yes," the sepulchral voice wailed up from the depths below; "it's Sam—Smiggs. Help me—for God's sake—help me!" and the last words died away in so low a tone as scarcely to be heard by Lance, who waited a moment, and then taking the lantern from Dave, and lowering it the length of his arm into the opening, called out:

"Can you see a lantern light? How are you placed?"

"I can see—nothing," came up after a moment; and then, after a short pause, "I am caught—in the rocks—by my feet and legs—up to my knees—I am all free—besides. For God's sake—help—help me!" And as before the last of the poor wretch's utterance died away to the faintest tones.

"Horrible! most horrible!" exclaimed Lance, pulling up the lantern and raising himself to a more upright posture. "For Heaven's sake, what can be done for the poor wretch? Was ever a man so signally punished for his crimes before? Terrible—terrible!" and the horror of the situation was fully expressed in our hero's voice.

"It's rough on him, by thunder!" exclaimed Dave; and he, too, in his homely way, more or less expressed the horror he felt at the terrible fate of Cur Smiggs, doomed to a horrible death by starvation in the bowels of the earth—doomed, beyond the power of man to the contrary!

"A tight fix, by thunder!" he added, reflectively, and then, parenthetically, "the wust I ever knew."

Lance passed him the lantern and again got down to the opening.

"How did this happen?" he called out, forming a speaking tube of his hand.

"Explosion," was the response, after a moment or two.

"Where are Mary May and her brother Charley?" inquired our hero.

No answer being returned for several seconds, Lance hallooed and then repeated the query.

"Who are you?" was the interrogatory, after a brief period of silence; and the one was sullen.

"Answer my question," said our hero. "If you have any hopes of release, where are those I ask for?"

"Blown to atoms—damn you!" was the fiendish response, followed by, "I know your voice. You are Lance—Lance Dane! You can't and you wouldn't help—help me!" and the terribly

situated scoundrel paused after a wicked imprecation.

"Miserable wretch," cried Lance, "I would help you if I could, sure as I live—"

"You wouldn't—you lie!" came up from the depths below, breaking in upon Lance, a volley of oaths and curses following, and then a report, strange in its sound, and echoed a hundred times.

"The wretch has shot himself," cried Lance, raising his head.

"The best thing he could do," sagely remarked Dave, adding: "I'd done it myself in his fix, sart-in, rather'n stay down thar'n starve."

Lance lowered his head again, hallooed and called out the name of the murdered victim of his own hellish acts—again and again called out his name—not a sound, however, coming back in response.

Ten minutes he remained in silence, too deeply impressed for utterance, when again he sent his voice down among the rocks, crying the wretch's name a dozen times, the rocks only responding.

"He's finished ther job," sententiously remarked Dave, as Lance came to his feet, adding: "An' won't have ter have no funeral, 'n' no tomb-stone."

He spoke with seriousness, not levity, and our hero, reaching for the lantern, merely said:

"Let us get out of this," and moved towards the daylight beyond, the distance being made after ten minutes' arduous exertion.

In the open air and daylight they looked around, and soon discovered the level bed of rock that formed the floor of the chamber that had so mysteriously opened without injuring its two occupants, and at once made for the spot.

"This must have been what the fellows called the 'Bridal Chamber,' said Lance, as he looked over and around the level bed of rock, thickly coated with lime, which showed the imprint of the prostrate forms of the two young women, their tracks, and those of the two robbers.

"Fresh tracks, yes," said Dave, "an' two pa'r purty small boots, too."

"I understand it," said Lance at once. "This was the chamber in which were Charley May and his sister. The explosion, which I can't account for, opened the way for their deliverance, and hurled Sam Smiggs to his doom. While we were in the cave, they were discovered, and very likely by two of the gang, and taken to the cave again. We must go back—no, these tracks lead away in another direction. Let us follow the trail."

CHAPTER XXIX.

"AT SEA"—THE AVENGER.

THE morning following, our hero and Dave rode south from Crook City.

They had followed the trail the day before until it failed them, had returned to, and gone through the several chambers of the cave, remaining in the first till daylight, and then ridden to the city mentioned, where they breakfasted.

"We are all at sea, now," said Lance, as they left the settlement behind them.

"'N' ain't got no pilot, 'n' no compass, 'n' no tiller," said Dave, in response.

"Well, we'll strike for Deadwood, Dave, and see Mr. May, if we can," said Lance, and the two struck off across country to the east of south.

In the afternoon they rode out of Deadwood, through Dead Man's Canon, and had proceeded about five miles in a southwesterly direction, when they saw four horsemen approaching in an opposite direction, about a mile distant.

"That's about the number we want ter see, if ther gal and her brother had horses," said Dave; which remark made it evident that the trip to Deadwood had not ended our hero's search for the May sisters—or brother and sister, as he supposed.

In three minutes the two parties were face to face, when Lance and Dave were greeted by Laughing Luke and Bill Blood, two other rough riders in company being strangers to them.

After the usual salutations, our hero asked Laughing Luke, after recounting the catastrophe at Black Sam's cave, whether he had seen four horsemen—he was satisfied that the parties were mounted—that day, or the evening before, describing one "Charlie" May as accurately as he could.

Great was his gratification to learn that the quartette had been seen by Luke and his party early that morning; that the leader told him he

was riding to the camp of the Dakotah Tomtit, in a canon miles distant.

"An' I tell you," said Luke, in conclusion, looking straight at Lance, "that there Tomtit has cussed hisself ever sence that day when you got away from him, an' swars he'll cook yer goose sure, if he ever gets hold on yer agen. It's best yer should know how he's got back onto yer, arter sayin' what he did—yer remember, I s'pose? Snakes 'n' pisen! but he aren't squar, the Tomtit aren't."

"All right, Luke," said Lance, gathering the reins of his thoroughbred, preparatory to starting on, and inquiring the direction of the canon, which, however, he felt certain he could find after a search; but he was in a hurry to find it.

Getting the directions from Luke, with the well-wishes of the latter, he and Dave started on their way.

They had not proceeded more than an eighth of a mile when our hero's attention was called to the clatter of a horse's hoofs in their rear, and as he turned a bullet went whistling between him and Dave.

"Rein out," he said to the latter, quickly, "and let's see who the fellow is paying attention to—you or me."

Dave made a right oblique and our hero a left, but not before a second bullet sped between them.

Both then whirled, reined in and unslung their rifles, being now about ten yards apart.

A third bullet settled the question as to which of the two was the object of the coming horseman's attention, for the leaden messenger cut the air within three inches of our hero's head, its peculiar whizz and the crack of Dave's rifle coming simultaneously to his ears.

"The rascal shoots very well," Lance sung out to Dave, and raising his rifle as he spoke, fired.

By a surprisingly quick movement of his horse, the murderous villain, unharmed by the bullet from Dave's rifle, avoided that of our hero, and reining in his horse, fired again at Lance, Dave firing at the same time, and our hero, through the skirt of whose buckskin coat the villain's bullet had cut, discharging his weapon a moment later.

"I'd like that horse o' his'n," said Dave, loud enough to be heard by Lance, adding: "he's jest ez quick as a cat, an' saved the devil's life when you fired, anyhow, if he didn't when I fired."

The fellow had spurred on after his last shot and now reined in at a distance of about four hundred yards from our hero and his companion, and sent a fourth bullet at the mark he had thrice aimed at, but going wide this time.

At the same time his bullet was speeding for Lance, one from the latter was speeding for him, and did not miss the mark.

"There's your horse, Dave," cried Lance, and at the moment the animal arose on his hind feet, then plunged forward, throwing its rider over its head, the rascal's rifle being flung afar.

Dave spurred his steed and dashed towards that of the dismounted man, which had turned and bounded away, while our hero started at an easy canter for the spot where lay his murderous assailant, his rifle now slung, and a revolver in hand.

The fellow lay as if dead, with his back towards Lance, but the latter as he rode up saw, by the dress of his assailant, that he was one of the two strange men with Laughing Luke, and remembered that the fellow had eyed him sharply.

Riding around in his front and close up, our hero took a good look at his face, as pale as death, but could not remember having seen it before that day.

The face looked like that of a dead man, but Lance evidently did not believe the fellow to be dead, for he asked: "Who are you, that you should assail me?"

With surprising quickness the fellow came to his knees, revolver in hand, saying: "I am Red-eye's brother. Die, damn you—die;" and fired at our hero, repeating the shot instantly.

Our hero's horse had reared high at the suddenly rising apparition, and at the first shot of the murderous ruffian its rider fell from his seat in the saddle to the ground.

"Ha—ha! I have shot him!" exultingly cried our hero's assailant; "shot him who couldn't be shot. Ha—ha—ha! my brother is avenged!" and with these words the fellow went to earth again, face downwards, his right arm stretched out from his body, his hand still grasping the butt of his revolver.

"You are mistaken, my man, if never before," said Lance, stepping around in front his horse, and placing his foot upon the villain's pistol.

There was no response, no movement, on the

part of the prostrate scoundrel, who lay as if "stone dead."

"Did I kill him?" was Lance's self-put query, and he stooped to take up the revolver, which was tightly grasped, and not readily yielded, by the hand that had tightened upon its butt.

"Dead, is he? I aimed for his knee," and Lance felt the pulse of the fellow, after securing his weapon.

"No, not dead, but in a fainting fit," and he turned the man on his back, discovering at once that his shot had taken effect where he intended it should.

"Halloo! hez he passed in his checks? queried Dave, riding up at that moment, leading the horse he coveted, a bright bay, full of strength and fire.

"No," replied Lance, taking a second revolver from the belt of the wounded man, whose eyelids an instant later opened upon the scene, but in a dreamy way.

A moment, however, and the fire of ferocious hatred flamed in his dark eyes, and his right hand sought his belt as he quickly raised himself with his left to a sitting posture.

Finding himself dispossessed of his weapons, he gave way to a terrible burst of rage and profanity, the fact that the one whom he supposed he had shot was unharmed, as far as he could see, adding to his unbridled fury.

"Yer cussed fool, what er yer rippin' out so fur?" said Dave, looking at the enraged man with no little disgust. "Yer played yer hand, an' 'twarn't no good, 'n' what er yer want to squeal so, fur? Yer warther biggest kind of a fool in ther fust place ter tackle ther young 'un—the 'Lion'—cos yer can't shoot him no more'n you can shoot a spook."

"Of course I can't, I've nothing to shoot with," replied the wounded man, with rage and bitterness, casting a fierce glance at Dave, then turning his glance upon Lance, only to quail before his gaze.

"I'd lend yer a pistol, only 'tain't no use tryin'," said Dave, phlegmatically, as he dismounted, when he said:

"I guess I'll swap horses with yer; thar's jest lightnin' in that piece o' hoss hide o' yours."

"May he break your neck, and he will, sure," said the man, malignantly.

"That's my risk," returned Dave, and was about to mount the coveted horse, when Lance said:

"You've got a good horse, Dave, that was not stolen—ten to one the other was. Keep yours."

Dave considered the matter a moment—he earnestly desired the animal—and then said:

"I guess it's best, young 'un. I don't want ter be took for a hoss thief nohow."

"Hem!" sneered the wounded man; "what better are you, anyhow?"

"Be kerful, Mister Man," said Dave, "or—"

Here Lance broke in, saying to his assailant: "Come, we have got to be off. If you wish to take the back track we will put you on your horse."

"Do it," said the fellow, with savage sullenness, and with no little difficulty he was placed on his horse by our hero and his friend, they, too, then mounting their own steeds.

Without a word further Lance wheeled his horse, and, with Dave, started on his way, when the stranger cried out in bitterness and hate:

"I have looked for you since the night you shot my brother. I found you and failed, damn your devil's luck. But I will see my brother avenged. You will die in the Tomtit's camp, and I will be in at the death."

CHAPTER XXX.

IN THE CANON—THE MINERS DROP THEIR MASKS.

THE two "honest miners"—"Bill and Jake"—were disaffected members of Black Sam's gang, and had arranged to enroll themselves in that of the Tomtit's; and they were about to visit the cave for the last time as confederates of Smiggs, when they were brought to the reader's notice at the moment of the catastrophe.

Discovering the two inanimate forms on the floor of the sundered "Bridal Chamber," and making further discovery a little later that they were sisters, from the lips of the latter themselves, the scoundrels, knowing nothing of what had happened to their chief and comrades, resolved to carry off the young women, and sever their connection with Black Sam at once; and so, assuming the roles of "honest miners," and so well acting the part that the sisters could not dispute the genuineness thereof, though one had doubts, the villains got away from the vicinity with their victims; and after mounting

them on two of their comrades' horses, which, with their own, were not far away, set out for the Tomtit's camp, reaching it the next day about noon.

They so acted like "good men and true," up to the time when the canon was reached, in which was the robber's camp, that Mary's doubts were dissipated, and both she and her sister settled to the firm belief that they were what they represented themselves to be, and that they intended to act honestly by them.

But this conviction was rudely crushed when the quartette entered the canon, and their hopes of being conducted to a place of safety—Deadwood, whither the sisters wished to go, being the pretended objective point of the robbers—were blasted at once by the scoundrel, Bill, who, suddenly presenting a pistol at the head of Mary—Jake following his example in regard to Clara—roughly said, for the ears of both sisters.

"Say, you gals, I an' Jake's been playin' honest miners to you two, but the play is done now, an' the curt'n's down. We ain't miners no more 'n' you're men, 'cos you've got on men's clothes."

The villain paused here, and Clara, whose face turned deathly white, uttered a piercing shriek of terror and disappointment, while Mary, not so intensely emotional, but terribly shocked, exclaimed:

"Merciful Heaven! who—what are you?" and she gazed at the scoundrel intently, trembling with apprehension.

"Wal, marm," returned Bill, his pistol still leveled at, and within two feet of Mary's head, "I can't say zactly what we mout be called, on'y we ain't miners, marm." Continuing, he said: "Some calls us road agents, which is per-lite, an' don't hurt our feelin's, marm."

"You are robbers, scoundrels, and more than likely, murderers," exclaimed Mary, her fear giving way somewhat to righteous indignation. "You are cowards, too, miserable cowards," she continued, "to threaten us with pistols at our heads."

"That may be, miss, but you've got pistols; we let you hev 'em fur a stall, savey? An' we warn't sech cussed fools ez to explain things, an' let you get the drop on us, not much. Now, I'll take my pistol. Keep your arm down or I'll shoot, sure's—"

The burly ruffian, now right by the side of his victim, took his pistol from her belt—both sisters wore pistol belts under their coats—his companion taking his from Clara, both then depositing the weapons with those they had previously displayed, in their own belts.

Dispossessed of their weapons, the two young women, entirely at the mercy of the scoundrels, slipped the leash from their tongues at one and the same instant, as if simultaneously actuated by the same impulse, and assailed the two villains with the hottest invectives, seemingly confident, both of them, that in their utterly defenseless condition, they could give their tongue free rein with impunity, and, in this, their confidence was not misplaced.

"Wal, gals," said Bill, who was chief spokesman, "you'll feel better now, arter gettin' rid of all that bile; an' if you've got through, I've got suthin' to say. Fust, you must know that you're in the stronghold of the Dakota Tomtit—Black Sam ain't a patch to him—whar your lives nor nothin' else would be safe a minute if you give yourselves away."

"Now, I've just thought o' somethin', which it is that you two are the sons of old Woods, the Cheyenne banker, savey? An' that's all you need to know; but if you don't know that, you'd better be prepared fur most anything."

"Your name's Tom," looking at Mary, "an' your name's Charley," looking at Clara, the rascal went on to say, "an' don't you furgit them names if the Tomtit asks 'em."

"Now, you play the Woods boys ez well ez we played the miners, an' everything will be loyely an' the goose hang high; ef you don't, thar'll be whooping up in Jericho, you bet! Now, git on, after you is manners."

"I won't budge a step, you infamous scoundrel!" exclaimed Mary, and instantly dismounted, believing that the ruffian would not resort to murderous extremity.

Her example was immediately followed by Clara, who would always follow her sister, though not always ready to lead; in this instance, however, going further—coolly sitting down.

Bill swore and Jake laughed, but the laugh was more ominous than the swearing.

"Git on that hoss!" the last mentioned ruffian commanded. "You," he added, addressing Clara, "git up 'n' git now, or yer'll wish yer had. We've got yer so fur along, 'n' yer ain't

goin' to balk on us now, 'n' don't yer furgit it," saying which the scoundrel pulled his revolver, cocked it, and deliberately leveled it at the head of the girl.

With a slight scream, the latter rose to her feet, looked earnestly at Mary, as if mutely asking what to do.

"You monstrous wretch!" the latter exclaimed, looking at Jake with anger and scorn the most pronounced; "you destable coward, to point a pistol at that girl," she added, as though of the sterner sex and ripe in years.

"It can't be helped," interposed Bill, gruffly; "you two hev got ter go along, an' you'd better b'lieve it, an' not be kantankorous about it. Git on them horses, or go afoot, jest ez you like; but you've got ter go, an' that settles it."

"Bet yer life it does," chimed in Jake, his tone and look precluding the idea of any hesitancy on his part of proceeding to extremities, if the need presented itself, his companion also showing in his rascally countenance, a settled determination to carry out his previously formed plans at all hazards.

Mary plainly read their faces, and saw at once that compliance was better than resistance; particularly as an immediate disposition was not to be made in their cases, but a length of time, longer or shorter, to elapse before their fate would be decided, which, indeed, might possibly be arrested by the chapter of accidents.

Seizing the bridle of the horse she had ridden, she made ready to mount the animal, saying to her sister:

"Mount, Clara, the villains will murder us if we do not, and can do no more in the end. Before that, as it would be under their dispensation, we may find deliverance." Saying which, she mounted her horse, Clara likewise getting to her saddle.

"Ha—ha—ha!" laughed Bill, following up his coarse guffaw with: "deliv'rance is good, eh, Jake?"

The latter gave utterance to a piece of vile and cruel wit, at which both rascals laughed heartily when they ordered their victim to ride on, they getting in the rear.

"You may laugh, you God-forgotten wretches!" exclaimed the bold, outspoken Mary; "but the Providence which watched over me in that horrible cavern, and protected my sister and myself in that awful moment when the mountain was rent asunder, will surely not abandon us now."

With these words confidently uttered, the brave and hopeful girl, full of faith, started on with her sister at her side, the latter casting upon the ruffians a look of unutterable scorn.

"That's right, you keep a stiff upper lip," drawled Jake in response to the words of Mary; "an' you, too," intended for Clara, "cos I hate sniv'lin', cryin' women. Keep a stiff upper lip, an' p'raps Providence or Pawtucket—I war born in Pawtucket—mout give yer a lift out o' this canon—"

"Stop, you impious wretch; be still!" cried Mary, suddenly wheeling her horse and casting such a look of mingled horror and indignation upon the ruffian that he was fairly abashed, strange as it may seem, and made no rejoinder.

Nothing further did she say, but turned her horse, and with her sister, to whom she spoke encouraging words, rode on through the canon to meet—she knew not what; the two scoundrels riding close in the rear, their remarks being wholly confined to themselves.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE TOMTIT'S CAMP—DEATH AT THE DOOR.

THE night before the two sisters were conducted to the canon, the Tomtit and his gang, or a portion thereof, for his was the largest band in the Hills, had attacked the stage bound for Deadwood from Cheyenne, in Dead Man's Canon, but with no success; three of the gang being left dead on the field.

It was not the treasure box they went for, for that goes empty into Deadwood, but the breast pockets of half a dozen well known and wealthy men of Cheyenne and Omaha, of whose movements the Tomtit had been informed.

Had these six individuals been the only occupants of the stage, very likely they would have surrendered without firing a shot, although well armed, as are all the passengers by stage, yet who always show the "better part of valor"—discretion—when the stages are stopped by enterprising "road agents" in pursuit of gain.

But there were two others in company, one a U. S. revenue collector, a wide-awake, resolute fellow, to whom "surrender" was an unknown

word as long as his ammunition held out; the other an unknown man who proved himself an able supporter of the collector.

These two men opened fire upon the robbers immediately, the latter ordered the driver to stop (which he did at the first summons), although the six wealthy, weak-spirited passengers begged them to refrain.

In the fight that ensued (three or four of the six passengers mentioned mustered up courage enough to fire their pistols once in a while, and aimlessly), the driver was wounded, when he reined in his team to a stand-still, but before this happened, three of the robbers had been laid out on the earth, the seven remaining fighting shy, for the Henry repeating rifles in the hands of the two men noticed, were kept exceedingly busy.

The driver sang out to the passengers that he was wounded and could drive no further; whereupon the unknown man volunteered to drive and immediately got out of the stage, but had hardly touched the ground when the team suddenly started up and off at a furious rate, leaving him at the mercy of the bandits, as those in the stage naturally concluded, as they were whirled through the canon towards Deadwood, where they arrived safely, the robbers declining to follow, and the wounded driver managing the horses to the best of his ability.

* * * * *

Now let us return to the camp of the Tomtit, a little beyond and to the west of the spot where we left the two sisters and their villainous escorts.

Looking about, we discover six men lying on blankets, with saddles for pillows; and see a number of horses on one side of the chamber or cavern, the animals all lying down.

One of the six men is the Tomtit, who was slightly wounded the night before; four of the other five are of his gang, two of whom were struck, but not seriously hurt, by bullets from the stage passengers; the sixth was the man who, volunteering to drive, jumped out of the stage, and who was captured by the bandits and taken to their camp, the chief believing him to be an individual worth a ransom.

On this account, the captured man was taken to the canon, before reaching which, the Tomtit felt certain that he had in his toils, Woods, the Cheyenne banker, and declared himself to that effect, his prisoner, however, denying that he was the person named; but writing an order, finally, on his banking house—persuaded so to do by a pistol leveled at his head by the robber chief—for twenty thousand dollars, which document, at the time we enter the stronghold of the Tomtit, the latter has on his person, and which he intended to collect himself, starting for Cheyenne on the morrow.

Asleep when we entered his camp, the robber chief soon awoke; and savage as a wounded tiger he arose from his not luxurious couch.

His wound, in the fleshy part of his left arm, pained him some, and the mood he was in, not being favorable to the ease and comfort of others, caused him to utter his blood-curdling screech: "Yaw-he—yaw-he—yaw-he!" which startled the sleepers in the cavern from their dreams on the instant, and most rudely, the prisoner starting up with eyeballs protruding and body trembling, and face all aghast—the unearthly screech had brought him a dream of an Indian massacre, and the yells of the whooping fiends he supposed were ringing in his ears when he started up.

His appearance amused the robber chief, who exploded with laughter—laughter, however, that had more of the hyena than the human about it, so sharp and heartless was it.

"Did you think that was the horn of Gabriel?" he asked his captive, after his laughter had subsided.

"I certainly did not—I hope the sound of that horn is not so terrible," returned the banker. "I thought it came from a legion of Sioux—what was it?"

At that instant a series of whistles—one, then two, then three—came to the ears of those in the cavern, the Tomtit immediately making for the entrance.

There he saw his two new recruits, Bill and Jake, and their captives, all dismounted.

As he looked at the latter the brow of the robber chief darkened ominously.

"Who the devil have you there?" he savagely asked, looking frowningly at Bill.

"Two sons of Woods, the Cheyenne banker," the latter replied, adding, in a tone that bespoke a confidence of mollifying his new chief, "they'll be worth a sweet ransom, cap'n."

"Woods' sons, eh?" spoke the chief, musingly,

adding, "singular, by Jupiter!" Then, as a fire which has been partially subdued suddenly flared up, he roared fiercely out: "By the thunder of Heaven, did you bring them here with open eyes."

"Do you think I'm a fool?" said Bill, with an air of injured innocence. "No, they were blind-folded," the rascal added, with all the semblance of truth.

To fortify the statement of his "pard," Jake asserted the same thing, and but for a look which Clara gave her sister, noticed by the chief, and by him interpreted, the lie might possibly have passed for the truth; as it was, it went for what it was worth.

"You are liars, both," thundered the incensed chief, and with surprising quickness pulled two revolvers from his belt, one in either hand, leveled them at the heads of Bill and Jake, and without an instant's hesitation, fired—fired as he would at two mad dogs—his hand never hesitating at murder.

Down went the miscreants, each with a bullet in his brain, the victims of a fatal oversight, from the consequence of which the truth would not have saved them, and a lie did not. It was poetic justice that meted to them the punishment they richly deserved for their damnable treachery to the sisters whom fate threw in their way, albeit the administrator was a murderer, who killed for other reasons.

Clara uttered a cry of horror, while her sister, involuntarily, as it were, ejaculated: "Oh, murder!" as the ruthless robber chief so summarily shot down the two miscreants, towards whom they (the sisters) could not have felt very kindly, yet who nevertheless were shocked at the terrible deed.

"Get in there, you two," savagely commanded the red-handed robber, pointing to the entrance of the cavern with one of his smoking pistols. "Get in there, and no remarks, for I am autocrat here."

With feelings that may be imagined, perhaps, but which cannot be expressed, the two sisters passed through the narrow entrance into the cavern, the sanguinary robber chief immediately following.

"Here, you," he cried, motioning to the two men of his band who were not wounded, "get those horses inside, and then take care of that carrion out there," meaning the victims of his fearful wrath.

CHAPTER XXXII.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER—DOOMED BY THE TOMTIT.

HAND in hand, after passing the entrance, the sisters made their way into the canon chamber; and as was natural they should, proceeded towards the outlet immediately opposite the place of ingress, this being the continuation of the canon proper, the bottom of which, however, was forty feet below the floor of the chamber from which the descent was perpendicular.

They had not taken more than ten steps, when the banker, who was seated on a stone not far from the direct line through the chamber, to the left, rose up quickly and sprang towards the sisters with an exclamation of mingled joy and surprise; and in an instant the arms of the two were clasped about him, his own in turn encircling the sisters.

Clara uttered a cry of the wildest joy, which was supplemented with a copious flow of tears, Mary fervently exclaiming:

"My father, oh, my father!"

"My children—my dear children!" the supposed banker exclaimed, then instantly in a whisper inquired: "Is your sex known to this monster?"

"No, father," Mary answered; "the terrible man was told that we were sons of Mr. Woods, the Cheyenne banker."

"What?" ejaculated the father in a whisper; "why he—this robber chief—thinks I am Woods. God in Heaven, how will it end? But be discreet. Let it go that you are my sons, Charles and William, and I the banker. It will give us time. 'Sh—here he comes."

"Well, my old Croesus of Cheyenne," said the chief, in a rudely facetious manner, as he came up, "so you've got your boys with you now, and nobody to thank for it, as those who brought them lit out right away."

Here the monster gave vent to a heartless laugh, to have heard which Mephistopheles would have chuckled with satisfaction, had not envy prevented.

"Those fellows thought to deceive me," he shortly went on to say, "and the amusement was a costly one. I can forgive you, sir, in consider-

ation of the order I hold—let me see—another of like amount, being \$10,000 a piece for each of your sons—by the way what queer voices they have, like women's—and that is dog cheap for them, \$10,000 a piece! So we'll to business right away."

The chief then left them, as if to obtain something needed in another part of the chamber.

"For Heaven's sake," whispered the father of the two girls (Mr. May, for it was he), "be careful. You don't understand this wholly. I can explain before long, perhaps, but be guarded for your lives."

He had no time to say more, for the robber chief was approaching with a writing portfolio in hand.

This he handed to Mr. May, and without deigning to say a word, went and sat down on the seat of stone vacated by the gentleman named, who stepped towards the entrance for a stronger light, and seating himself on an upturned bucket, wrote a second order, payable to bearer for \$20,000, signing it S. B. Woods, written on the back as on the front: "Do not fail to pay to whomsoever presents, as life depends," the signature following.

Leading his daughter, who had followed him, Mr. May went back to the chief and handed him the order and portfolio.

"I hope they'll pay these orders for my sake," said the chief, after reading the one handed to him, which he was able to do where he sat; "and they had better pay them for your sake and your sons," he added, and the tone and emphasis were ominous.

Mr. May said nothing, but his feelings under the circumstances may possibly be imagined.

He started to leave the spot, when the robber called upon him to stay.

"I've been thinking," said the latter, "about your sons. They were brought here with their eyes open, by fools who died for it. If these orders are paid, I think one of the boys will have to remain here as hostage for the other's good faith not to betray my hiding-place until I seek other localities, which I possibly shall in time."

"They will bind themselves not to betray it," said Mr. May, for the want of anything better to say.

"Ha—ha—ha!" laughed the bandit, derisively, following with a ribald jest. "Bind themselves? Ha—ha! with ropes of sand—oaths!" he went on to say, with derision. "No—no! I can bind them more securely," and he waved his hearer away, calling him back almost immediately, however.

"Forty thousand dollars more, and I will require no hostage, Mr. Woods," he said. "If I get the money—eighty thousand dollars in all—you and your boys can go free; and I'll go, too—I can afford to. Think it over till to-morrow morning, when I shall start for Cheyenne. I'm going to take another nap."

During the next two hours the bandit slept, as did his two wounded men.

During this period, father and daughters, who sat at the opening opposite the entrance, listened to each other's stories, talking in a low tone, and speculated, with no little uneasiness, as to how their predicament would terminate.

They felt that they were in the hands of sanguinary monster, who if he did not delight in murder, had no hesitation about committing it on the slightest provocation, as the sisters had seen; and the latter knew that the life of their father would not be worth a moment's purchase after the return of the robber chief, disappointed, from Cheyenne; and they felt that they themselves would not be spared by the enraged monster, when he returned from his fruitless errand.

Five minutes later on, while the three were yet conversing, the signal whistle was given at the entrance, as it had been when the sisters arrived.

"I'll bet that's him," Clara exclaimed, clutching her sister's arm, and looking towards the entrance, her face all aglow with excitement. "I feel sure it is him; something tells me so," she added, and was constrained to rise, owing to extreme agitation—she would have flown to the entrance had not her father restrained her.

The robber chief was on his feet before the last notes of the signal were given, and strode quickly to the entrance, where he greeted brusquely some one without.

A few moments and a horse entered, then a man carrying a saddle.

Clara's countenance fell.

It was not the "Lion," but the fellow whom our hero had compelled to go with him from Sidney, and from whom he had got the information concerning the whereabouts of Black Sam's cave.

Soon the chief and this fellow, who had come to join his standard, were in conversation, the former learning of the catastrophe at the cave

mentioned, and of Black Sam's disappearance; also what took place at Sidney, which included the part taken by our hero, and what followed; how he, the narrator, was forced to leave Sidney by the Lion, whom he did not then know, who wanted to rescue a prisoner held by Black Sam—a girl captured by him some time before.

"They call him the 'Lion'; I think he is the devil," said the fellow in conclusion. "He made me do what he pleased, and I couldn't help myself."

"I'll make deviled lion of him," roared the chief, "if I ever get hold of him again, and that will be a more palatable dish to set before the boys than deviled kidneys or deviled crabs. I had him once; but I was a fool and let him go. Somehow he fascinated me; but he won't again—he won't! Yaw-he—yaw-he—yaw-he!"

The frightful yell of the robber chief filled the vast chamber—vast in height—and surged into the canon beyond, in waves of startling sound, eliciting from Clara a piercing scream of terror.

"What's that, a woman's squawk?" queried the new-comer of the chief, looking over to the spot where the two were seated.

"No," replied the chief. "I've got old Woods, the Cheyenne banker, and his two sons there; and one of the milk-sop boys gave that screech, to fill in where my voice didn't touch, I suppose."

"Whew! you don't say so? Them Woodses ought to pan out well, cap'n—\$50,000, sure. No 'fense 'f I take a look at the banker? He bilked me once on some dust—damn him!"

"No; look him over," said the chief, and the other walked over to the two, who, having heard the conversation, were not a little ill at ease.

"Sold! By the big horn spoon, sold!" cried the fellow in a tone of mingled mirth and surprise, before he reached the spot.

Forward like a panther, irritably wounded, sprung the Tomtit at the fellow's words, his magazine of rage ignited and exploding.

"By the thunder of Heaven!" he roared, "what did I hear?"

In a moment he stood before his three prisoners, who had risen to their feet, the workings of his wicked though handsome face, the black frown on his brow, the deadly gleam in his dark eyes in the intensity of his rage being something terrible to witness.

"Who are you?" he demanded in tones of thunder of Mr. May; "and these milk sops, who are they?"

"My name is May, and I am their father. I told you I was not the banker, but—"

With a pistol in either hand, cocked, the demoniacal robber chief did not wait for the other to finish, but broke in upon him.

"Enough!" he roared in his fiendish rage. "By the thunder of Heaven, you die—you and your milk sops, both!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A DEVILISH PROPOSITION—THE BETRAYER'S DEATH.

"HOLD on, cap'n, don't shoot them fellers—them young ones! They ain't fellers, they're gals!" cried the betrayer of the three captives, almost screaming the words as he sprang to the side of the robber chief, as the latter raised his revolvers to fire.

With glaring eyes and face all amazement, the chief turned upon the fellow, his arms falling to his sides as he made the movement.

"What do you say?" he sharply demanded of the fellow; "women, are they?"

"Yes, they are," was the reply. "One of 'em—that one there," indicating Mary, "is the gal Black Sam gobbled at Rawhide spring; had her in the busted bridal chamber, as he called it; an' 'tother, she's her sister, which Sam bamboozled at Sidney, an' got away with jest afore that cuss of a 'Lion' turned up—she blabbed on herself to Sam, an' he told me of it that day; an' I was to watch that pal o' the 'Lion's' an' see that he didn't follow Sam." The fellow paused for an instant, and then added: "Them's the gals, you bet!"

The Tomtit put up his pistols, nothing of the tremendous rage he had exhibited now showing itself.

Stepping up to Mary, the larger of the two sisters, he took her by the arm, by no means roughly, and turning her face to the open canon, scrutinized it closely.

"Of course you're a woman," said he at length; adding, "any fool could tell that."

"And now," said Mary, "as you know the facts, I take it for granted that you will allow us to depart, as there is nothing to gain by keeping us here. I appeal to your natural nobility

of heart, which your countenance warrants me in believing is very great."

"My eulogist is too flattering," said the robber chief, releasing the arm of the captive young woman, and raising his sombrero politely, and with much grace.

"I sincerely hope—indeed, I believe, looking into your face, sir—that I do not flatter, but only do you justice," was the courtly response of the captive.

The robber smiled, and saying: "You should be one of Queen Vic's ladies of honor, and grace her drawing-room levees," stepped up to her sister, standing with her back to the canon, and turned her, not ungraciously, towards the light.

"H'm!" he ejaculated, "how you could pass for one of the masculine sort, I can't see."

"I did pass for such even with you, it appears, at the entrance to this place," Clara replied, taking her cue from her sister, and exhibiting little if any trepidation.

The bandit laughed quite heartily.

"You've got me there," said he, "I acknowledge; but just then I—but no matter. What is your name—and yours?" he asked of the sisters, respectively.

Without any hesitation they answered, when, sitting down, and bidding the sisters be seated, ignoring their father entirely, the robber chief intimated that he would like to hear their stories; and as his eyes happened to rest upon Clara as he ceased speaking she said:

"I have nothing much to tell—Mary has more."

"Please favor us with your story, Mary," the robber very politely said; and with ready compliance, his captive proceeded to the relation of what had befallen her up to the time when her sister had been brought to the cave, the narrative then including both up to the present moment.

What they had to impart was briefly given, the incident at Cheyenne not being forgotten, but most enthusiastically dwelt upon, our hero, of course, being the chief figure, and altogether lovely and invincible.

"How?" sneered the bandit; "you seem to think him a demi-god. If he were here, I would prove to you and him that he is only a clod. But let him slide. Your cases are more important at present. You two have had it rough, but it was destiny—fate. It was to be, and was, and what is yet to be, will be. I am a fatalist. I was fated to become what I am; you were fated to be thrown in my way, and whatever may follow, the fingers of fate have already written."

The bandit paused, and Clara, to whose soul the ominous words of the speaker had struck indefinable terror, glanced from him to her sister, then to her father, both of whom felt that the words conveyed more than they expressed.

To the father, who had seated himself near his daughter, the bandit then turned his attention.

"Your story," said he, "would not interest me at all; but the story is not yet completed, and the conclusion may be interesting."

The robber paused for an instant, as if to give his hearers time to fathom his ambiguity. They fathomed it sufficiently to know that something dreadful was very possible, if not very probable.

"You deceived me," he continued, when he was interrupted by Mr. May, who said: "I certainly did not deceive you; you deceived yourself. Did I not declare that I was not the banker you took me for?"

"Yes, you did," said the robber, frankly, "but you wrote those orders, and raised my expectations very high, and these have been dashed to the lowest depths within a few moments."

"Had I not written them, would I have been with the living now?" earnestly asked Mr. May.

"Be that as it may," said the robber, evasively, "I have been disappointed, cheated."

"Disappointed, I suppose; cheated, not at all," rejoined Mr. May.

"I choose to consider that I have been," said the robber, coldly, a slight smile on his lips just disclosing a white line along his glittering teeth, which gave a sardonic expression to his handsome face, Clara shuddering as she looked at him.

Pausing, the robber looked steadily at Mr. May, as if awaiting further say from him.

"Well, as you choose to think so, what then?" said the latter.

"What then!" ejaculated the robber, sharply, his brow knitting and his eye flaming. "Can't you guess, fool?"

"I suppose I can," said Mr. May, seriously, after a momentary silence.

"Well, then, to business. What do you propose?"

"Protesting that I neither deceived nor cheated you, I yet propose, in consideration of your letting my daughters and myself go in safety from this place, to make over to you one half of my interest in the May Barton Mine—you must have heard of it—which may prove to be very valuable."

"Ha-ha-ha!" sardonically laughed the robber chief.

"Half of a divided interest in a hole in the ground! Ha-ha-ha! What do you take me for—a superlative ass!"

"For not less than \$100,000 can my interest be bought, much as you effect to despise it," said Mr. May, earnestly, arising as he spoke.

"Yes, it could," said the robber, "it could be bought for \$90,000, when you could purchase your own and your daughter's liberty, and have—say \$10,000 to start another mine with."

The detached portion of the proceeding sentence was uttered by the chief in a most intensely sarcastic tone, followed by a burst of devilish laughter, which caused Clara to shudder again, and clutch her sister convulsively.

"I don't know what I can do, then," said Mr. May, sadly. "I have no ready money—everything is in that mine."

"I have hit upon a way out of the difficulty," said the robber, mildly, looking at Mary with a significant smile. "You have two marriageable daughters—"

"Mercy!" shrieked Clara, interrupting him, and springing to her feet; Mary, still keeping her seat, looking at the robber chief as though wishing she could annihilate him then and there.

"A very proper place, perhaps, for an exclamation point," said the robber to Clara, at the interruption; then, looking at the father, said, after repeating his words in reference to the daughters: "In lieu of money, which you do not possess, you can give me your daughters in marriage—"

"Monster!" exclaimed Mary.

"Oh—oh!" shrieked Clara, the father looking at the robber in mute astonishment, his mind terribly racked.

"Don't be alarmed," the robber said, speaking to the girl; "I don't want you both—I am no Mormon. Mary shall be my bride—the bandit's bride—and you," addressing Clara—"my lieutenant's bride."

"Never—never—never!" screamed Clara, her father and sister uttering no word, but looking at one another with horror indescribable.

"See here," now interposed the fellow who had betrayed the trio, his words intended for the Tomtit, near whom he had stood, "I give them gals away to you, an' if fair's fair, one on 'em ought to be my bride. 'I'll take the little one, an' she shall be Hank Ruber's bride."

Never was astonishment more thoroughly depicted on the human face than at that moment on the face of the robber chief at the audacity of his new recruit, at whom he gazed with expanded eyes for a moment, saying nothing.

"You—will—take—the—little—one—eh?" he slowly enunciated at length, and paused.

Then the mine of passion within took fire, and the Tomtit was himself again—as when in the wildest throes of rage.

"By the thunder of Heaven," he roared, springing to his feet and drawing a revolver. "By the thunder of Heaven," he repeated, "you signed your death warrant when you presumed to dictate to the Lord of the Hill."

He fired instantly, but the fellow was nearly as quick as he, drawing and firing as he sprang back from the roused tiger in human form.

The movement saved him, probably, for he was not struck by the bullet intended for him; but not so with the chief, the muscle of whose left leg was grazed by the fellow's bullet.

The sisters and their father quickly got out of range, and the two wounded men of the band, awakened from their slumbers, came to their feet, but made no demonstration.

Quicker than his antagonist, the robber chief fired his second shot, the report of which could hardly be heard above the demoniacal howl of rage that broke from the monster's lips as he felt the sting of the hot bullet on his leg.

Down went Hank Ruber—as he had called himself—a corpse to the floor of rock, the Tomtit's bullet striking him in the eye, and tearing into the brain, the bullet from his own pistol, discharged the instant he was struck, whistling close to the head of the robber chief.

Clara uttered a cry of horror as the victim fell, the murderer giving vent to one of satisfaction, at the same instant stepping over them to the dead body, which he spurned with his foot, and relieved of all weapons, calling on his two men to drag the carcass out of the chamber.

At the first shot Mr. May had suggested flight

to his daughters, but on being told what he did not know, having been blindfolded when brought into the canon, that there was a sentinel posted about fifty yards from the chamber, he saw that it was useless, and with the girls, awaited the next move of the sanguinary robber chief.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE TOMTIT'S BRIDE—THE LARIAT.

WITH all the hellish fires within him now aroused to their fiercest burning, the Tomtit was ready to proceed to put into execution anything dictated by his evil genius, without any further temporizing.

"Come, old man," he said, approaching Mr. May and the sisters, "having settled with that fellow—you should thank me for that," he said to Clara, interrupting himself—"having settled with him, I must now settle with you!"

Here Clara uttered a most piercing, heart-rending shriek, for she saw in her mind her father butchered in cold blood by the sanguinary monster before her; and the shriek burst involuntarily from her lips.

"There—that'll do, miss," the robber said; "your throat and lungs are not equal to any more yells like that."

"They are—they are!" cried Clara, the termination of the last word the beginning of as shrill and prolonged a scream as ever passed a woman's lips, her nervous system being terribly excited.

"Shut up!" roared the robber, savagely, accompanying the injunction with an oath.

"I won't—I won't—I won't!" screamed the girl, beside herself with nervous fear.

The robber, to whose brow came a frown as black as blackest midnight, drew forth a pistol, "curses not loud but deep" coming from his lips.

Catching her sister in her arms, Mary placed one hand on her mouth, and whispered into her ear—"For God's sake, Clara, be still! Be quiet, do, or he will murder you at once—murder father and me as well!"

The sorely exercised girl gave way in a moment to hysterical sobs, Mary leading her to a seat on a stone hard by.

"Now, then, we'll settle this business," growled the robber, replacing his pistol, his words being addressed to Mr. May, who was filled with dread on account of his daughters, and who said nothing in response.

A moment and the robber went on to say: "Your daughter Mary—I have taken a fancy for her—must be mine—the bandit's bride! The other one my lieutenant will be glad to wed, no doubt. It will be romantic for the girls—and girls thrive on romance—and it will be a novel thing for the boys to witness a wedding here. It is a novel idea, and strikes me favorably, too. We will have the wedding this afternoon—mine and Mary's; my lieutenant may not be back till to-morrow."

"Great Heavens!" exclaimed Mr. May, now fully realizing to what black depth the sanguinary and unconscionable robber would go; "great Heavens, is it possible that you demand this?"

"Only this and nothing more," said the other, with provoking calmness and aggravating facetiousness; then turning to the sisters and calling out: "Mary, come here!"

To disobey this peremptory summons was sheer folly, and Mary knew it; consequently she came towards the bandit, whose words in reference to herself she had heard, braced by all the courage and strength of will she could summon to her support.

The self-assured robber took her hand. Passively she yielded it, knowing that at the extreme moment it would be time enough to resist—rebel.

"We are to be wedded, Mary," the robber said, in the mildest tones the girl had heard from his lips—positively soft and insinuating were they.

"What! without my consent or my father's?" rejoined Mary, with affected surprise.

"Oh, you will not refuse your consent, and see your father die. He will not refuse and die, knowing that his death would avail nothing. A bandit's bride—how romantic. Eh, Mary?"

"But who will marry us?" asked the latter, forgetting for the moment the dreadful position she was in, and thinking only how the ceremony could be performed.

"Well, your father—he can marry us," was the calm response.

"My father!" cried Mary, horror bringing her at once to a sense of her terrible position. "Why, he is no minister. He cannot marry us."

Speaking thus, she snatched her hand from the robber's hold and stepped back.

"It doesn't matter; I will accept him as such," said the robber, in the coldly quiet way which he could assume at times, continuing: "And as such he will act."

"Merciful Heaven! you cannot mean it!" Mary exclaimed, in horror-stricken tones.

"Hem! but I do mean it. It was a sudden freak of mine, this wedding—honorable, you must allow—and will take place at once."

"It will not!" exclaimed Mary, stamping her foot, and standing now with her father on one side, and her sister on the other, the latter having recovered her composure and come over to her.

The Tomtit, disdaining now to rage, merely smiled, and putting a silver whistle to his lips, blew three times upon it, loud and shrill.

In a moment, the two men who dragged out the dead body, re-entered the cavern, and were very shortly followed by the two who had been ordered to dispose of the bodies of the Tomtit's previous victims.

All four approached their chief at once, neither speaking a word, however.

"Boys, there's going to be a wedding," brusquely said the chief.

The "boys" looked at him not a little puzzled, and then from one to another, as if for the meaning of his words, for none of them knew that two of the gentler sex were present; and great was their surprise at his subsequent words.

"The groom is myself, the bride elect is the middle one of those three," and he pointed at Mary. "Come, my blushing bride," he said, as sweetly as any innamorata, his tone changing the next instant when he spoke to Mr. May. "Stand forth to do your office, sir."

"Most monstrous!" ejaculated Mr. May, without moving.

"Samson—you be my best man; Enders—you stand up with the bride's sister—the one on the left of the bride," the chief said to two of his men; when, after a private word to another, he stepped towards the group of captives, and extended his hand as if expecting Mary's hand would be put forth to meet it.

"Stand off!" she cried; "this farce is too prolonged," and stepped back.

"Farce, if you so effect, miss; but it must be played to the end, or tragedy will take its place," said the robber, in coldly determined tones, and sprang towards the unhappy girl, who, on the impulse, turned and fled toward the place of egress, one of the band dashing after her.

Crack went a revolver fired by the Tomtit, justice compelling us to say that it was not fired with intent to kill, but only to frighten the flying girl, whose father stood petrified with horror, and whose sister, thrice crying "monster!" sprang upon the bandit from behind and caught his long hair with both hands, pulling him backwards for a moment.

She was pulled off instantly by one of the band and held tightly, the chief taking no notice of her whatever. A moment later and Mary was caught and brought back, the robber chief grasping her wrist tightly, with his small but powerful right hand.

"Now, by the thunder of Heaven!" he vociferated, the passion within him again arising, "this wedding must proceed. Why, it is livelier on my wedding-day than it was with Petruchio, and I may have as much of a shrew to tame."

Mary's response was a desperate effort to free herself from this grasp, and unsuccessful.

"Come," said he again to Mr. May, "we are ready."

"I am not," said the latter, firmly. "The most monstrous and damnable part you assign to me, I cannot take, will not."

"Then, by the thunder of Heaven!" roared the bandit, "the tragedy is on."

Instantly a rope was thrown over the head of Mr. May, and in a trice his arms were bound.

A scream burst from the lips of Clara, which was instantly followed by the cry:

"The 'Lion!' The 'Lion!'" in such startling and peculiar tones that every one quickly and instinctively turned towards the passage into the cave, expecting to see the form of him she named, but there was no appearance.

They knew it was only a frenzied call, when a moment later she wailed:

"Why don't he come? Why don't he come?"

"Fool!" cried the robber chief, in a raging voice, "call and keep calling. I only wish he would come."

"He will! he will!" shrieked the frenzied girl, and fought the man who held her like a wildcat.

This was mere by-play in the tragedy then on. After his arms were bound, the noose of a lariat, which was rove through an eye-bolt in a rock jutting some ten feet from the side of the rear

opening of the chamber, and twenty feet from the floor thereof, was thrown around the neck of Mr. May and tightened thereon, the lariat being then hauled taut, two of the band waiting for the word to swing the victim from the floor.

"Now," said the bandit to his victim, "do or die. Marry us or hang. Play in the farce or the tragedy."

"I cannot do what you wish," said Mr. May, and he looked at his daughter for her approval.

"You shall not, father," she cried, and then exclaimed most fervently: "Oh, why does Heaven not strike this monster dead!"

With a sneer, the robber chief, still holding Mary by the wrist, roared out:

"Up with him! Let the fool choke!"

A strong and sudden pull on the lariat, and the victim of the Tomtit's caprice and fiendishness was swung from his foothold, and up from the rocky floor six feet or more.

"Murderer! murderer!" shrieked Mary, and catching the robber's beard with her left hand, sprang from her feet as if to fasten her teeth in the monster's face.

"The 'Lion!' the 'Lion!'" screamed Clara at that very instant, in the tones of one mad with sudden joy; then sinking lifeless in the arms of the man who held her.

The cry might not have carried the eyes of the miscreants towards the entrance to the chamber, as before; but the sharp, ringing crack of a rifle—two, we may say, for a second shot followed close upon the first—heard at the instant of the cry, did draw the eyes of the robber chief and of two of his men—the two who had hold of the lariat fell in their track, the suspended victim falling at the same moment—and the three first mentioned saw two forms in the light at the entrance of their stronghold—those of Lance the "Lion," and Dave Plum, his faithful companion.

CHAPTER XXXV.

LANCE THE "LION"—THE BATTLE IN THE CAVE.

INSTANTLY the Tomtit, who had seen two of his men fall, released the wrist of Mary and thrust her from him, but not without losing a portion of his beard, which the tightly clutched fingers of the young woman tore from his face, as he threw her off and to the floor of the cavern.

"By the thunder of Heaven!" he roared in his rage, which was terrible, pulling a pair of revolvers from his belt, "who are you that invade these precincts?"

"Wal, Mr. Tomtit," said Dave, rifle in left hand, revolver in right, "I ain't nobody, much; but the young un yer—he ar the 'Lion.' I've heard yer've soured on the 'Lion.'"

"Soured on him—the villain lies who says it," exclaimed the robber, and his tone was that of one who felt hurt at a groundless imputation—it had flashed to him to mask his design just then—and replacing his pistol as he spoke, he stepped forward to meet our hero, and presented his hand with all the frankness of friendship and cordiality—apparently.

Distrusting him, our hero yet gave him his hand, for reasons best known to himself, and to the looker-on the hand-shake would have appeared a cordial one.

They had just parted the grip when Mary rushed up, she, when thrown off by the robber from his person, having flown to her father, released his neck from the lariat, and his arms from the cord that bound them; and being rejoiced to find him but little the worse for what he had undergone.

Then to her sister she flew, and, satisfied that she was the victim of a swoon only, rushed to the spot where stood our hero.

"Oh!" she ejaculated, and the utterance was full of heart-felt relief and fervency. "Oh, if you are the 'Lion'—the young man of whom my brother, Charley May has told me so much—for God's sake, take us from this place! My sister lies there in a swoon. My father, but for you, and your companion, would have been a corpse, and I—Heaven only knows the rest! Save us—save us!"

Before our hero could reply, the robber chief gave vent to a burst of laughter, most melodious and mirthful; he was a wonderful dissembler.

"Well—well," said he, in a voice really musical, "if this best piece of fun of mine—this broadest farce—wasn't taken as a serious thing by this smart woman. Ha—ha—ha! I only regret," he continued, "that your coming, young man, robbed me of the opportunity of proving to this young woman that I am not a demon,

that what she took for reality was only a joke—a rather too severe practical joke, perhaps."

"Rather too severe, I should say," said Lance; "rather too broad a farce—too realistic—when a man is swung up as the one we let down."

"It was—I acknowledge it," said the robber, in a tone of contrition, well-feigned. "But to prove to the victims that it was nothing but a joke, and to you, that I have not 'soured' on you, as our friend said, I say, let them go with you if you please, or by themselves—and this I should not be frightened into saying, with two men and myself against you two as you well know. We are three to two—pretty good odds, you will allow."

"You are not three to two, false-tongued villain!" cried Mary May; "for I am now armed, and so is my father," and as she spoke, she displayed two revolvers—yes, pointed them at the now smiling Tomtit. "I took the weapons," she said, in continuation, "from the two miscreants so deservedly shot, one of whom is dead, and the other not worth much to you or himself, I guess."

Just then, Clara, who had returned to consciousness under the attentions of her father, came forward with him, meeting our hero, (not then enlightened as to her sex) with every demonstration of joy, and formally introducing him to her father and sister.

"Didn't I tell you he would come to save us, you monster?" she suddenly said to the Tomtit, who all the time had been smiling. "I prayed for his coming, you murderer," she added, "and Heaven be praised, he came in time."

Supported now as she was, the young woman would have dared anything, not only in speech, but action, and the bandit did not escape a tongue-assault.

"Where is all your ferocity now?" she cried, looking him in the face unflinchingly. "Where are your pistols and ropes—your shootings and hangings? Coward! You were a tiger a moment ago in our presence. You are a lamb now in the presence of the 'Lion.' Why don't you shoot at him? You dare not—you coward, you outcast, you murderer!"

"I have no occasion," said he, blandly, "no desire to shoot at him. I am his friend."

"Friend!" ejaculated Clara, in a tone intensely sarcastic, feeling secure under the protection of our hero, whom she accounted the most puissant of men, and altogether invincible. "Friend—humph! You are the friend of the devil, and he alone is your friend."

"Come, we had better be going," said Lance at this juncture, glancing at Mr. May and Mary, "we have a long ride and a tough one—"

A pistol shot and the whizz of a bullet cut our hero short.

The shot came from the direction of the entrance, and was fired at Lance by one of the two men who had entered the cavern; two others being in the act of passing the portals, one lame, being helped by the other.

The man who fired, using his left hand, was Redeye, the lame man his brother, wounded a few hours before by our hero. He was the second in command of the band—the Tomtit's "lieutenant."

"Hold—hold!" thundered the chief, as a second shot from Redeye aimed at, but missing our hero, followed close upon the first, and as he thus roared out, he pulled a revolver and leveled it at the desperado.

As far as the latter was concerned, the mandate and menace were unnecessary, for the scoundrel fell dead in his tracks, shot down by Dave, our hero not deigning to draw a weapon.

An instant later, however, and the shining barrel of one of his revolvers gleamed as he drew it forth, the occasion being the turning of the Tomtit upon Dave, his face black with fury, and his eye flashing with a deadly fire.

If the frowning chief had meditated shooting, he desisted and instantly composed his face, saying:

"I forgot myself. He did well in shooting that man."

Then he called:

"Men, come here."

Four of his desperadoes obeyed the summons, and it was noticeable that all put up their pistols as they came up.

"That's right, my boys," said the chief, approvingly, advancing slowly, "never shoot at that young man," pointing to Lance.

Had he issued the command: "Seize that young man," his desperadoes could not have sprung to execute it quicker than, at his words, they sprang upon our hero.

"Yaw-he—yaw-he—yaw-he!"

The fearful yell rang through the cavern. It

was the Tomtit's pæna of joy—the "Lion" was powerless in the embrace of his miscreants.

"By the thunder of Heaven, we'll hang him—hang him like a dog!" he vociferated, in roaring tones of triumph.

Quicker than he ever moved before, endowed with the strength and vigor of the strongest lion, Dave Plum sprang upon the group, of which Lance was the struggling center, and before the Tomtit's words were wholly out, had flung one of the scoundrels to the rocky floor, and tore away another, as though they were manikins of no weight or strength; a fierce growl, almost a roar, like that of a lion, coming from him.

With the howl of a fiend incarnate, the Tomtit sprang towards Dave, but was arrested by a shot from Mr. May, which struck him in the left breast, the bullet cutting along the ribs and out at the side.

With a roar of rage that would seem impossible from human lips, he turned, pulling the revolver he had just placed in his belt and fired in return, Mary, from another point, opening upon him, but too much excited to shoot with effect.

To her the bandit paid no attention, but occupied himself with her father; and a dodging duel took place, the oaths of the bandit drowning the reports of pistols.

A piercing scream from Clara, who not being armed, had moved away, rung through the cavern—her father had fallen, and to his side she rushed.

The bandit turned upon Mary, just in time to meet a bullet from her pistol, which ploughed the flesh on his face from his nose to his right ear; but she fell almost at the instant, brought down by a bullet from his pistol.

"Hang him, will yer, yer darned coyote?" roared Dave, at this juncture, in a triumphant tone, for the Lion was free, having torn himself from two of the miscreants that had fastened upon him, after Dave had thrown off two.

"Go for the treacherous scoundrel, Dave!" cried our hero, "and get the price set on his head. Shoot him down as you would a mad dog. His head will be good for the reward. I will take care of these fellows here."

He had need to be quick about it, for two of the scoundrels, not ten feet away, fired at him, one of the bullets cutting through the right sleeve of his buckskin coat, the other whistling in his ear on the left.

With a revolver in either hand, he sent a bullet from either into the right shoulder of each of the desperadoes, the weapons of both falling from their hands.

At the same time, the Tomtit, regardless of Dave, his face all blood and ferocious with rage, sprang towards him—our hero—but, catching a bullet from the man he ignored, staggered and fell forward.

"I fetched yer, yer mean coyote," cried Dave, another cry blending with his from the front of the case. "Snakes 'n' pizen! they're whoopin' up in yer!" which, it is unnecessary to say, came from Laughing Luke, who, with three others at his back, had entered the cavern, Bill Blood being one of the party.

"Whar's ther Tomtit? Thar's five thousand dollars on his head, 'n' we want it—snakes 'n' pizen!" Luke cried, advancing.

"Reckon I got the bulge on him," said Dave; but even as he spoke, the Tomtit, who had gone quite down, recovered himself, and dashed for the rear of the cavern, catching the lariat on his way, and pulling the noose to the eyebolt where it held.

A moment more and he stood on the brink of the canon, when, turning, he fired three shots—exhausting the weapon, probably—aiming at Lance; and then, with a volley of oaths, attesting his ferocious rage and disappointment, disappeared from sight, the lariat straining with his weight, and, after a moment or two, slipping through the eyebolt.

The movement of the desperate chief—the most dreaded of the desperadoes of Deadwood and vicinity—had been so sudden, and his intention so little suspected, that, not until he had disappeared in the depths of the canon, did any one move in his direction, Dave being the first to do so, as our hero, who moved towards the prostrate Mary, remarked: "That settles his account, I think;" believing, as he did, that the fall must have killed the robber chief.

Of the latter, nothing could be seen in the black depths of the canon, (the afternoon was drawing to a close, and the canon, light only a few minutes daily, was black as ink below the chamber), and not a sound could be heard by ears quick to hear the slightest noise.

"We'll get at him ter-morrow, Dave, somehow," said Laughing Luke; adding, "but I s'pose he's your peccoon."

"We'll make it all right," responded Dave, ending with "the mean coyote," in a contemptuous tone.

With the disappearance of the robber chief, the battle ended.

Our hero found Mr. May to be wounded in the left side, but not dangerously; while Mary he found to have been struck in the right hip, or rather on the hip bone, the ball glancing off, leaving a painful but not serious wound.

Night coming on, it was resolved to remain in the cavern until morning, on account of the wounded gentleman and his daughter, for whom, our hero, Dave, and Luke's party did all in their power.

Of the Tomtit's gang, those who could leave were compelled to do so—and glad they were—while the wounded ones were all disarmed, collected together and guarded.

Lanterns were found and lighted, all the horses outside brought in, and everything arranged for as comfortable a night as possible, with a man on guard at the entrance; and not till sometime after all the preparations had been made, did Dave make known that he had been wounded; a stray bullet perforating the calf of his left leg.

"I'll tell you something in confidence, Dave," said our hero, in a whisper. "I got a scald just above my left elbow; a stray bullet it must have been. It is nothing, but mum, remember."

"As an oyster, young un," was the response.

Before resigning himself to slumber, Lance, who devoted himself to the Mays, was much surprised to learn that "Charley" was an alias for Clara, and became much interested in the account of the younger sister's adventures in men's apparel, as well as in the story of the other; learning everything that happened to the sisters

before he slept, which, under the circumstances, was not till late; and when he finally stretched himself on a blanket, he felt happy that, through his means three persons had been saved from a dreadful fate.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

CONCLUSION.

FOUR days later, on the railroad platform, at Cheyenne, a little before the time at which was due the eastward bound Union Pacific express train, were grouped among others, our hero, Dave Plum, and Mr. Salisbury, stage proprietor.

"May we ever expect to see you this way again, Lance?" was the interrogatory of Mr. Salisbury.

"Very likely I shall come out here again, some time or other," was our hero's reply; "I am going to take a rest for some months."

"You need it, have earned it, and will leave a good record behind you."

"Oh, I don't know," said Lance.

"But I do. The rescue of the May family, and the breaking up of the Tomtit's gang, and that rascal's death, probably—his disappearance, anyhow—were record enough, my boy. But though these may be the brightest leaves in the chaplet you have won, the half of the others would have won honors for you. And now, as the train is coming, let me tender you this package as a slight token of the admiration and esteem in which my partners and myself hold you."

So saying, the gentleman handed our hero a paper package, in the shape of a small cigar box, and quite heavy, remarking that it would not probably be convenient for him to open it until he reached his destination.

Our hero was expressing his thanks as the train came rattling along, when he shook hands with Mr. Salisbury and Dave, the eyes of the latter moistening as he bade his friend adieu.

"Oh, here, Lance," said Mr. Salisbury, just before the train came to a standstill, "weren't you going to tell me the secret of your immunity from bullets—eh?"

"I didn't promise," said Lance, laughing, "and as I may be out this way again, it is best to keep it, I think."

"Right, my boy. Good luck to you."

"Thanks! Good-by. Good-by, Dave. Take care of yourself!" and Lance was on his way east.

* * * * *

A few words more.

The Mays were escorted by our hero and Dave to Deadwood, where the wounded father and daughter shortly recovered, and where the sisters doffed their male attire.

Dave went into the employ of the stage company, getting a good billet through the influence of Lance, and proving a faithful servant.

As for the Tomtit, some believed he got away, others that he gave up the ghost in the canon somewhere, after his wound and fall.

The package given to our hero contained a magnificent watch, and six pounds of Deadwood "dust."

[THE END.]

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